THE WORLD'S BEST ONE HUNDRED DETECTIVE STORIES

VOLUME ONE

THE WORLD'S BEST ONE HUNDRED DETECTIVE STORIES

(IN TEN VOLUMES)

EUGENE THWING

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

VOLUME ONE

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY

NEW YORK AND LONDON

Copyright, 1929, By
FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
(Printed in the United States of America)

Copyright Under the Articles of the Copyright Convention
of the Pan-American Republics and the
United States, August 11, 1910.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
Introduction		7
The One Best Bet	*Samuel Hopkins Adams*	11
The Little House	*H. C. Bailey*	30
The Hermit Crab	*H. C. Bailey*	56
The Sting of the Wasp	*Richard Connell*	87
Mirage	*Sinclair Gluck*	106
The Tea-Leaf	*Edgar Jepson and Robert Eustace*	129
The Services of an Expert	*Harry Stephen Keeler*	150
Popeau Intervenes	*Mrs. Belloc Lowndes*	161
The Poacher	*Sidney Gowing*	177
The Tinkle of the Bells	*Anthony Wynne*	190

INTRODUCTION

WHAT constitutes "the best one hundred detective stories" can never be decided beyond challenge. It will always be relative to the times, the tastes of the readers, and the popularity of the authors.

The detective story has developed as many types as other fiction. Ask each of four readers to choose the best novel among four, by Zane Gray, Rafael Sabatini, Joseph C. Lincoln, and Kathleen Norris, and altho each reader may make a different choice all will be equally correct because they represent genuine preferences of type.

Formerly the detective story was almost exclusively a problem in analytical deduction. Clues were minutely examined, elaborately discussed, and critically compared. These arguments filled page after page. Detail was piled upon detail, and the clues relevant to the crime were hopelessly mixed with those calculated to lead the reader astray. Dramatic action was largely absent. The detective story did not become widely popular in this form, and Poe, who is regarded as the originator of the modern detective tale, abandoned the field after his three Dupin stories, which are still reverently cherished by Poe lovers.

The universal vogue of the detective story as a recognized type of fiction may be said to have begun in the United States with Anna Katharine Green's "The Leavenworth Case," in England with A. Conan Doyle's famous Sherlock Holmes, and in France with Gaboriau's police tales. Rapid development followed, and as the writers and readers have increased in number, the style of the detective story has broadened and new types have become popular. To-day a collection of one hundred stories, all patterned after the so-called canonical type, would satisfy only a small fraction of the wide circle of detective-story fans.

Lovers of purely analytical deduction scorn the story that substitutes exciting adventure or melodrama. Those

who insist upon the presence of external clues minutely observed and correctly interpreted have scant patience with the detectives who depend upon intuition, mind-reading, or pseudo-scientific methods of discovery. More and more, however, the newer converts to detective stories are demanding thrills and swift action as well as mystery. Willard Huntington Wright, the well-known editor, literary critic, and expert on detective fiction, calls even the Sherlock Holmes stories "obsolescent," and says that the long analytical arguments of Poe's detective stories "act only as irritating encumbrances to the modern reader of detective fiction."

Thus "the best" of former years are no longer regarded as the best by the majority of readers to-day. "The best" usually means to each reader the ones he likes best.

The attempt has been made more than once to fix a standard pattern for the modern detective story. But it can not be done. S. S. Van Dine, for example, declares that "for the writing of detective stories there are very definite laws—unwritten, perhaps, but none the less binding; and every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries lives up to them." Forthwith he proceeds to formulate these laws in numerical order, and then to violate at least seven of then in his own stories. No writer of vigor and originality who understands the tastes and demands of his public can be chained to any other man's formula. He will create his problems, his interesting situations, and his thrills in his own way, according to his skill or inspiration, and the degree of his popularity will tell him whether or not he is right.

The editor of an anthology must consider all these things in making his selections. If he allows his own individual preferences to dictate his choice in too many cases, his collection will not be popular with very many readers. An author who has achieved reputation and popularity must be recognized and included even if the editor chances not to be among his admirers. It is safe,—more, it is necessary,—to select, for the "best one hundred," stories of widely differing types and stories by authors whom the

public has voted best by buying their books in large numbers.

The practise of creating a distinct personality as the sleuth who dominates all of an author's detective stories has become almost universal, and many writers are associated inseparably with their favorite sleuth. In the present anthology I have gathered together many of these famous master detectives of fiction from America and Europe, for the first time, in a world congress to display their skill in solving crime mysteries and catching criminals.

Most of the great detective stories of the past have been reprinted again and again, and there seems little need to repeat them in this anthology. I have planned to make this. rather, a representative collection of modern authors, and altho much expense for copyright fees could have been saved by including the old stand-bys, I have dared to omit even Poe's masterpiece, "The Purloined Letter," altho threatened with death myself by a friend who promises to "bite me in the thorax" for such heresy. Everybody knows Poe's classic stories, or ought to. Anyone who hasn't read "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Gold Bug," and all the rest, should buy a handy set of Poe's works without delay.

This is a truly international anthology. There are 52 American stories and 49 from England, France, and Germany. The detective story has great vogue in England. Recent press dispatches tell how "King George is fighting his way back to health on a literary diet of detective yarns and thrilling mystery stories." After his long and almost fatal illness, we are told that "thrillers and detective tales fascinate King George." The Prince of Wales and the great British public feel the same way.

In the United States the popularity of detective stories has been growing beyond all bounds. Leading publishers have remarked upon it as the outstanding phenomenon of the book trade. And the flood of detective novels and short stories is increasing to a deluge. The public appetite seems insatiable. One man told me recently that he has read, in the last thirty-five years 3500 full-length detective

novels and more than 1500 short detective stories. Those who claim to know say that "detective stories meet the recreational needs of all classes of humanity, from the college professor, the scholar, the diplomat, and the scientist, all the way down to the most primitive and untutored reader. They appeal directly to the intelligence: they are a source of mental stimulation. The finest minds in America to-day read them." Much publicity has been given to the fact that such men as President Hoover, Ambassador Morrow, Ex-Secretary of State Kellogg, and J. Pierpont Morgan are devotees of the detective story. The University of Chicago has demonstrated scientifically that detective tales are a good tonic for tired nerves, and many overwrought business men are known to find relief in this absorbing type of fiction.

Acknowledgment to author, publisher, and copyright owner has been made, as fully as possible, on the first page of each story in this collection. But I can not be content without a warmer word of appreciation for the very cordial and friendly cooperation extended to me by the publishers, the authors, and their literary agents in gathering these stories. They have made it a pleasant task. I sincerely hope they will feel some satisfaction in the result.

EUGENE THWING.

October, 1929

THE WORLD'S BEST 100 DETECTIVE STORIES

SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

THE ONE BEST BET

"MORRISON has jammed the Personal Liberty bill through," said Waldemar, scrawling a head on his completed editorial, with one eye on the clock, which pointed to midnight.

"That was to be expected, wasn't it?" asked Average Jones.

"Oh, yes," replied the editor-owner of the *Universal* in his heavy bass. "And now the governor announces he will veto it."

"Thereby bringing the whole power of the gambling ring down on him like an avalanche."

"Naturally. Morrison has declared open war against 'Pharisee Phil,' as he calls Governor Arthur. Says he'll pass the bill over his veto. In his heart he knows he can't do it. Still, he's a hard fighter."

Average Jones tipped his chair back against the wall of the editorial sanctum. "What do you suppose," he inquired with an air of philosophic speculation, "that the devil will do with Carroll Morrison's soul when he gets it? Deodorize it?"

"Harsh words, young sir! Harsh words and treasonable against one of our leading citizens; multimillionaire philanthropist, social leader, director of banks, insurance com-

(From "Average Jones," by Samuel Hopkins Adams; copyright 1911. Used by special permission of the publishers, The Bobbs-Merrill Company. Copyright in Great Britain by Samuel Hopkins Adams.)

panies and railroads, and emperor of the race-track, the sport of kings."

"The sport of kings—maintained on the spoils of clerks," retorted Average Jones. "'To improve the breed of horses,' if you please! To make thieves of men and harlots of women, because Carroll Morrison must have his gambling-game dividends! And now he has our 'representative' legislature working for him to that honorable end!"

"Man to see you, Mr. Waldemar," said an office boy, appearing at the door.

"Too late," grunted the editor.

"He says it's very particular, sir, and to tell you it's something Mr. Morrison is interested in."

"Morrison, eh? All right. Just step into the inner office, will you, Jones? Leave the door open. There might be something interesting."

Hardly had Average Jones found a chair in the darkened office when the late caller appeared. He was middle-aged, pursy, and dressed with slap-dash ostentation. His face was bloated and seared with excesses. But it was not intoxication that sweated on his forehead and quivered in his jaw. It was terror. He slumped into the waiting chair and mouthed mutely at the editor.

"Well?" The bullet-like snap of the interrogation stung the man into babbling speech.

"'S like this, Misser Wald'mar. 'S like this. Y-y-yuh see, 's like this. Fer Gawsake, kill out an ad for me!"

"What? In to-morrow's paper? Nonsense! You're too late, even if I wished to do it."

The visitor stood up and dug both hands into his side pockets. He produced, first a binocular, which, with a snarl, he flung upon the floor. Before it had stopped bumping, there fluttered down upon the seat of his chair a handful of greenbacks. Another followed, and another, and another. The bills toppled and spread, and some of them slid to the floor. Still the man delved.

"There!" he panted at last. "Money talks. There's the stuff. Count it. Eighteen hundred if there's a dollar. More

likely two thou. If that ain't enough, make your own price. I don't care what it is. Make it, Misser. Put a price on it."

There was something loathsome and obscene in the creature's gibbering flux of words. The editor leaned forward.

"Bribery, eh?" he inquired softly.

The man flinched from the tone. "It ain't bribery, is it, to ast you to rout out jus' one line from an ad an' pay you for the trouble. My own ad, too. If it runs, it's my finish. I was nutty when I wrote it. Fer Gawsake, Misser—"

"Stop it! You say Morrison sent you here?"

"No, sir. Not exac-ly. 'S like this, Misser Wald'mar. I hadda get to you some way. It's important to Misser Morrison, too. But he don't know I come. He don't know nothing about it. Oh, Gaw! If he finds out—"

"Put that money back in your pockets."

With an ashen face of despair, the man obeyed. As he finished, he began to sag at the joints. Slowly he slackened down until he was on his knees, an abject spectacle of disgust.

"Stand up," ordered Waldemar.

"Liss'n; liss'n t' me," moaned the man. "I'll make it three thousand. Fi' thou—"

"Stand *up!*"

The editor's hearty grip on his coat collar heaved the creature to his feet. For a moment he struggled, panting, then spun, helpless and headlong from the room, striking heavily against the passage-wall outside. There was a half-choked groan; then his footsteps slumped away into silence.

"Ugh!" grunted Waldemar. "Come back, Jones."

Average Jones reëntered. "Have you no curiosity in your composition?" he asked.

"Not much—having been reared in the newspaper business."

Stooping, Average Jones picked up the glasses which the man had thrown on the floor and examined them

carefully. "Rather a fine instrument," he observed. "Marked N. K. I think I'll follow up the owner."

"You'll never find him now. He has too much start."

"Not at all. When a man is in his state of abject funk, it's ten to one he lands at the nearest bar. Wait for me."

In fifteen minutes Average Jones was back. There was a curious expression on his face as he nodded an assent to his friend's inquiring eyebrows.

"Where?" asked Waldemar.

"On the floor of a Park Row saloon."

"Dead drunk, eh?"

"No—er; not—er—drunk. Dead."

Waldemar stiffened in his chair. "Dead!" he repeated.

"Poison, probably. The ad was his finish, as he said. The next thing is to find it."

"The first edition will be down any minute now. But it'll take some finding. Why, counting 'classified,' we're carrying fifteen hundred ads in every issue. With no clue to the character of this one—"

"Plenty of clue," said Average Jones suavely. "You'll find it on the sporting page, I think."

"Judging from the man's appearance? Rather far-fetched, isn't it?"

"Judging from a pair of very fine binoculars, a mention of Carroll Morrison's name, and, principally, some two thousand dollars in a huge heap."

"I don't quite see where that leads."

"No? The bills must have been mostly ones and twos. Those are a book-maker's takings. The binocular is a racing-man's glass. Our late friend used the language of the track. I think we'll find him on page nine."

"Try," said Waldemar, handing him a paper still spicy with the keen odor of printer's ink.

Swiftly the Ad-Visor's practiced eye ran over the column. It checked at the "offer" of a notorious firm of tipsters who advertised to sell "inside information" on the races to their patrons. As a special lure, they were, on this day, letting the public in on a few particularly "good things" free.

"There you are," said Average Jones, pointing out the advertisement.

To his astonishment, Waldemar noted that his friend's indicatory finger shook a little. Normally, Average Jones was the coolest and most controlled of men.

"Noble and Gale's form ad," he observed. "I see nothing unusual in that."

"Yet—er—I fancy it's quite important—er—in its way."

The editor stared. "When you talk like a bored Britisher, Average," he remarked, "there's sure to be something in the air. What is it?"

"Look at the last line."

Again Waldemar turned to the paper. " 'One Best Bet,' " he read. " 'That the Pharisee will never finish.' Well?"

" 'That the Pharisee will never finish,' " repeated Average Jones. "If the Pharisee is a horse, the line becomes absurd at once. How could any one know that a horse would fail to finish in a race? But if it—er—referred—er—to a man, an official known—er—as Pharisee Phil—"

"Wait!" Waldemar had jumped to his feet. A thrill, increasing and pulsating through the floor beneath them, shook the building. The editor jumped for the telephone.

"Composing room; quick! Give me the foreman. Hello! That you, Corrigan? Stop the presses. . . . I don't care if we miss every train in the country. . . . Don't answer back. This is Mr. Waldemar. Stop the presses!"

The thrill waned and ceased. At the telephone, Waldemar continued: "Look up the Noble and Gale tip ad, page nine, column six. Kill the last line—the One Best Bet. . . . Don't ask *me* how. Chisel it out. Burn it out. Dynamite it out. But kill it. After that's done, print. . . . Hello; Dan? Send the sporting editor in here in a hurry."

"Good work," said Average Jones. "They'll never know how near their idea of removing Governor Arthur came to being boasted of in plain print."

Waldemar took his huge head in his hands and rocked it gently. "It's on," he said. "And right-side-before. Yet, it tries to tell me that a man, plotting to murder the

governor, advertises the fact in my paper! I'll get a new head."

"Keep that one for a while," advised Average Jones. "It may be better than you think. Anyway, here's the ad. And down yonder is the dead man whom it killed when he failed to kill it. So much is real."

"And here's Bendig," said the other, as the sporting editor entered. "Any such horse as 'The Pharisee,' Bendig?"

"No, sir. I suppose you mean that Noble and Gale ad. I saw it in proof. Some of Nick Karboe's funny work, I expect."

"Nick Karboe; N. K.," murmured Average Jones, laying a hand on the abandoned field glass. "Who is this man Karboe, Mr. Bendig?"

"Junior partner of Noble and Gale. He puts out their advertising."

"Any connection whatever with Mr. Carroll Morrison?"

"Why, yes. Before he went to pieces he used to be Mr. Morrison's confidential man, and lately he's been doing some lobbying for the association. I understood he'd quit it again."

"Quit what?" asked Waldemar. "Drink?"

"Worse. The white stuff. Coke."

Average Jones whistled softly. "That explains it all," he said. "A cocaine field on a debauch becomes a mental and moral imbecile. It would be perfectly in character that he should boast of a projected crime."

"Very well," said Waldemar, after the sporting editor had left, "but you don't really connect Morrison with this?"

"Don't I? At least I propose to try. See here, Waldemar; two months ago at a private dinner, Morrison made a speech in which he said that men who interfered with the rights of property, like Governor Arthur, were no better than anarchists and ought to be handled accordingly. Therefore, I don't think that a plan—a safe one, of course—to put 'Pharisee Phil' away would greatly disturb our friend's distorted conscience. You see, the governor has

laid impious hands on Morrison's holy of holies, the dividend. By the way, where is Governor Arthur?"

"On the train for this city. He's to review the parade at the Harrisonia Centennial, and unveil the statue tomorrow night; that is, to-night, to be accurate."

"A good opportunity," murmured Average Jones.

"What! In the sight of a hundred thousand people?"

"That might be the very core of the opportunity. And at night."

"If you feel certain, it's a case for the police, isn't it?"

"Hardly! The gambling gang control the police, wholly. They would destroy the trail at once."

"Then why not warn the governor?"

"I don't know him."

"Suppose I make an appointment to take you to see him in the morning?"

This was agreed upon. At ten o'clock Governor Arthur received them at his hotel, greeting Average Jones with flattering warmth.

"You're the amateur detective who scared the Honorable William Linder out of the mayoralty nomination," said he, shaking hands. "What are you going to do to me?"

"Give you some racing news to read, Governor."

The governor took the advertisement proof and read it carefully. Characteristically, he then re-read it throughout.

"You think this is meant for me?" he asked, handing it back.

"I do. You're not exactly what one would call popular with the racing crowd, you know, Governor."

"Mr. Morrison, in the politest manner in the world, has allowed me to surmise as much," said the other, smiling broadly. "A very polished person, Mr. Morrison. He can make threats of extinction—political, of course—more delicately than any other subtle blackmailer I have ever met. And I have met several in my time."

"If this were merely political extinction, which I fancy

you can take care of yourself, I shouldn't be taking up your time, sir."

"My dear Jones"—a friendly hand fell on the visitor's shoulder—"I gravely fear that you lack the judicial mind. It's a great thing—to lack—at times." Governor Arthur's eyes twinkled again, and his visitor wondered whence had come his reputation as a dry, unhumorous man. "As to assassination," he pursued, "I'm a sort of Christian Scientist. The best protection is a profound conviction that you're safe. That reacts on the mind of any would-be assassin. To my mind, my best chance of safety lies in never thinking of danger."

"Then," said Waldemar, "any attempt to persuade you against appearing at Harrisonia to-night would be time wasted."

"Absolutely, my dear Waldemar. But don't think that I'm not appreciative of your thoughtfulness and that of Mr. Jones."

"What is the program of the day, Governor?" asked Average Jones.

"Rather a theatrical one. I'm to ride along Harrison Avenue to the reviewing stand, in the old coach-of-state of the Harrison family, a lofty old ark, high as a circus wagon, which has been patched up for the occasion. Just before I reach the reviewing stand, a silk cord is to be handed to me and I am to pull the veil from the great civic statue with that, as I move on."

"Then I think that Mr. Waldemar and I will look the ground over. Could we get you by telephone, sir, if necessary?"

"Any time up to seven o'clock."

"What do you think of the chance of their passing the bill over your veto?" asked Waldemar.

"They are spending money as it has never been spent before," replied Governor Arthur. "I'll admit to you, Waldemar, that if I could find any legitimate method of calling Morrison off, I would not scruple to use it. It is, of course, Morrison's money that we are fighting."

"Possibly—er—that, too—er—might be done," drawled Average Jones.

The governor looked at him sharply. "After the Linder affair, Mr. Jones," said he, "I would follow you far. Call my secretary at any time, if you want me."

"Now to look over the line of parade," said Average Jones as he and Waldemar emerged from the hotel.

Half an hour's ride brought them to the lively suburban city of Harrisonia, gay with flags and bunting. From the railroad station, where the guest of honor was to be met by the old coach, to the spot where the civic statue awaited its unveiling at his hands, was about half a mile along Harrison Avenue, the principal street. The walk along this street developed nothing of interest to Average Jones until they reached the statue. Here he paused to look curiously at a number of square platforms built out from windows in the business blocks.

"For flash-light outfits," explained Waldemar. "One of them is our paper's."

"Flash-lights, eh?" said Average Jones. "And there'll be fireworks and the air will be full of light and noise, under cover of which almost anything might be done. I don't like it! Hello! What's here?"

He turned to the glass front of a prosperous-looking cigar store on the south side of the avenue and pointed to a shattered hole in the window. Behind it a bullet swung on a thread from the ceiling, and this agent of disaster the proprietor had ingeniously turned to account in advertising, by the following placard:

> AIM LOWER
>
> If you expect to shoot holes in *our* prices.
>
> WE CHALLENGE COMPETITION.

"Not bad," approved Average Jones. "I feel a great yearning to smoke."

They entered the store and were served by the proprietor. As he was making change, Average Jones asked:

"When was the bombardment?"

"Night before last, sometime," replied the man.

"Done by a deflected bullet, wasn't it?"

"Haven't any idea how it was done or why. I got here in the morning and there she was. What makes you think it was a deflected bullet?"

"Because it was whirling end-over. Normally, a bullet bores a pretty clean hole in plate glass."

"That's so, too," agreed the man with some interest.

Average Jones handed a cigar to Waldemar and lighted one himself. Puffing at is as he walked to the door, he gazed casually around and finally centered his attention on a telegraph pole standing on the edge of the sidewalk. He even walked out and around the pole. Returning, he remarked to the tobacconist:

"Very good cigars, these. Ever advertise 'em?"

"Sure." The man displayed a tin square vaunting the virtues of his "Camarados."

"Outside the shop, I meant. Why wouldn't one of those signs look good on that telegraph pole?"

"It would look good to me," said the vendor, "but it wouldn't look good to the telegraph people. They'd have it down."

"Oh, I don't know. Give me one, lend me a ladder, and I'll make the experiment."

The tobacconist stared. "All right," he said. "Go as far as you like." And he got the required articles for his customer.

With silent curiosity Waldemar watched Average Jones place the ladder against the outside of the pole, mount, nail up the sign, drop a plumb-line, improvised from a key and a length of string, to the ground, set a careful knot in the string and return to earth.

"What did you find?" asked the editor.

"Four holes that you could cover with a silver dollar. Some gunnery, that!"

"Then how did the other shot happen to go so far wrong?"

"Do you see that steel work over there?"

Average Jones pointed across to the north side of the street, just opposite, where a number of buildings had been torn down to permit of the erection of a new one. The frame had risen three stories, and through the open spaces in the gaunt skeleton the rear of the houses facing on the street next northward could be seen. Waldemar indicated that he did see the edifice pointed out by Average Jones.

"The bullet came from back of that—perhaps from the next street. They sighted by the telegraph pole. Suppose, now, a man riding in a high coach passes along this avenue between the pole and the gun operator, over yonder to the northward. Every one of the bullets which hit the pole would have gone right through his body. Probably a fixed gun. As for the wide shot, we'll see."

As he spoke, the Ad-Visor was leading the way across the street. With upturned face he carefully studied the steel joists from end to end. Presently he pointed. Following the line of his finger, Waldemar saw a raw scar on the under side of one of the joists.

"There it is," said Average Jones. "The sights were a trifle off at the first shot, and the bullet ticked the steel and deflected."

"So far, so good," approved Waldemar.

"I can approximate the height of the steel beam from the ground, close enough for a trial formula," continued Average Jones. "Now, Waldemar, I call your attention to that restaurant on the opposite corner."

Waldemar conned the designated building with attention. "Well," he said finally, "what of it? I don't see anything wrong with it."

"Precisely my point," returned the Ad-Visor with a grin. "Neither do I. Therefore, suppose you go there and order luncheon for two, while I walk down to the next block and back again. I'll be with you in four minutes."

He was somewhat better than his word. Dropping into the chair opposite his friend, he figured swiftly and briefly

on the back of an envelope, which he returned to his pocket.

"I suppose you've done a vast amount of investigating since you left me," remarked the editor sardonically. "Meanwhile, the plot to murder the governor goes merrily on."

"I've done a fair amount of pacing over distance," retorted Average Jones imperturbably. "As for the governor, they can't kill him till he comes, can they? Besides, there's plenty of time for them to change their minds. As a result of my little constitutional just now, as a simple exercise in mathematics, you and I will call at a house on Spencer Street, the next street north, after luncheon."

"What house?"

"Ah! that I don't know, as yet. We'll see when we get there."

Comfortably fed, the two strolled up to Spencer Street and turned into it, Average Jones eying the upper windows of the houses. He stopped in front of an old-fashioned frame structure which was built on a different plan of floor level from its smaller neighbors of brick. Up the low steps went Jones, followed by the editor. An aged lady, of the species commonly conjectured as "maiden," opened the door.

"Madam," said Average Jones, "could we rent your third floor rear for this evening?"

"No, sir," said she. "It's rented."

"Perhaps I could buy the renters off," suggested Jones. "Could I see them?"

"Both out," she answered shortly. "And I don't believe you could get the room from them, for they're all fixed up to take photographs of the parade."

"Indee—ee—eed," drawled Average Jones, in accents so prolonged, even for him, that Waldemar's interest flamed within him. "I—er—ra—a—ather hoped—er—when do you expect them back?"

"About four o'clock."

"Thank you. Please tell them that—er—Mr. Nick Karboe called."

"For heaven's sake, Average," rumbled Waldemar, as they regained the pavement, "why did you use the dead man's name? It gave me a shiver."

"It'll give them a worse one," replied the Ad-Visor grimly. "I want to prepare their nerves for a subsequent shock. If you'll meet me here this evening at seven, I think I can promise you a queer spectacle."

"And meantime?"

"On that point I want your advice. Shall we make a sure catch of two hired assassins who don't amount to much, or take a chance at the bigger game?"

"Meaning Morrison?"

"Meaning Morrison. Incidentally, if we get him we'll be able to kill the Personal Liberty bill so dead it will never raise its head again."

"Then I'm for that course," decided the editor, after a little consideration, "though I can't yet make myself believe that Carroll Morrison is party to a deliberate murder plot."

"How the normal mind does shrink from connecting crime with good clothes and a social position!" remarked the Ad-Visor. "Just give me a moment's time."

The moment he spent jotting down words on a bit of paper, which, after some emendation, he put away.

"That'll do for a heading," he remarked. "Now, Waldemar, I want you to get the governor on the 'phone and tell him, if he'll follow directions, we'll put the Personal Liberty bill where the wicked cease from troubling. Morrison is to be in the reviewing stand, isn't he?"

"Yes; there's a special place reserved for him, next the press seats."

"Good! By the way, you'd better send for two press seats for you and myself. Now, what I want the governor to do is this: get a copy of the Harrisonia *Evening Bell*, fold it to an advertisement headed 'Offer to Photographers,' and as he passes Carroll Morrison on the stand, hold it up and say to him just this: 'Better luck next time.' For anything further, I'll see you in the reviewing stand. Do you think he'll do it?"

"It sounds as foolish as a college initiation stunt. Still, you heard what Governor Arthur said about his confidence in you. But what is this advertisement?"

"As yet, it isn't. But it will be, as soon as I can get to the office of the *Bell*. You'll meet me on this corner at seven o'clock, then?"

"Yes. Meantime, to be safe, I'll look after the reviewing stand tickets myself."

At the hour named, the editor arrived. Average Jones was already there, accompanied by a messenger boy. The boy wore the cheerful grin of one who has met with an unexpected favor of fortune.

"They've returned, both of 'em," said Average Jones as Waldemar approached. "What about the governor?"

"It took a mighty lot of persuasion, but he'll do it," replied the editor.

"Skip, son," said the Ad-Visor, handing the messenger boy a folded newspaper. "The two gentlemen on the third floor rear. And be sure you say that it's a personal, marked copy."

The boy crossed the street and entered the house. In two minutes he emerged, nodded to Average Jones and walked away. Five minutes passed. Then the front door opened cautiously and a tall, evil-looking man slunk into the vestibule. A second man followed him. They glanced eagerly from left to right. Average Jones stepped out to the curbstone.

"Here's the message from Karboe," he called.

"My God!" gasped the tall man.

For an instant he made as if to turn back. Then, clearing the steps at one jump, he stumbled, sprawled, was up again instantly and speeding up the street, away from Average Jones, turned the corner neck and neck with his companion who, running powerfully, had overtaken him.

The door of the house stood ajar. Before Waldemar had recovered from his surprise, Average Jones was inside the house. Hesitation beset the editor. Should he follow or wait? He paused, one foot on the step. A loud crash within resolved his doubts. Up he started, when the voice of

Average Jones in colloquy with the woman who had received them before, checked him. The colloquy seemed excited but peaceful. Presently Average Jones came down the steps.

"They left the ad," said he. "Have you seen it?"

"No; I hadn't time to get a paper," replied Waldemar, taking the copy extended to him and reading, in large display:

> OFFER TO PHOTOGRAPHERS
>
> $1,000 Reward for Special Flash-light Photo of Governor Arthur in To-night's Pageant. Must be Taken According to Plans and Specifications Designated by the Late Nick Karboe.
>
> Apply to A. Jones, Ad-Visor.
>
> Astor Court Temple, New York City.

"No wonder they ran," said Waldemar with a grin, as he digested this document.

"And so must we if we're to get through the crowd and reach the reviewing stand," warned Average Jones, glancing at his watch.

Their seats, which they attained with some difficulty, were within a few feet of the governor's box. Within reach of them sat Carroll Morrison, his long, pale, black-bearded face set in that immobility to which he had schooled it. But the cold eyes roved restlessly and the little muscles at the corners of the lips twitched.

"Tell me that he isn't in on the game!" whispered Average Jones, and Waldemar nodded.

The sound of music from down the street turned all faces in that direction. A roar of cheering swept toward them and was taken up in the stands. The governor, in his high coach, came in sight. And, at that moment, terror struck into the soul of Waldemar.

"Suppose they came back!" he whispered to Average Jones. "We've left the house unguarded."

"I've fixed that," replied the Ad-Visor in the same tone. "Watch Morrison!"

Governor Arthur approached the civic statue. An official, running out to the coach, handed him a silken cord, which he secured with a turn around the wrist. The coach rolled on. The cord tautened; the swathings sundered and fell from the gleaming splendor of marble, and a blinding flash, followed by another, and a third, blotted out the scene in unbearable radiance.

Involuntarily Morrison, like thousands of others, had screened his sight with his hands after the second flash. Now, as the kindlier light returned, he half rose, rubbing his eyes furiously. A half-groan escaped him. He sank back, staring in amaze. For Governor Arthur was riding on, calm and smiling amid the shouts.

Morrison shrank. Could it be that the governor's eyes were fixed on his? He strove to shake off the delusion. He felt, rather than saw, the guest of honor descend from the coach; felt rather than saw him making straight toward himself; and he winced and quivered at the sound of his own name.

"Mr. Morrison," the governor was saying, at his elbow, "Mr. Morrison, here is a paper that may interest you. Better luck next time."

Morrison strove to reply. His voice clucked in his throat, and the hand with which he took the folded newspaper was as the hand of a paralytic.

"He's broken," whispered Average Jones.

He went straight to Governor Arthur, speaking in his ear. The governor nodded. Average Jones returned to his seat to watch Carroll Morrison who sat, with hell-fires of fear scorching him, until the last band had blared its way into silence.

Again the governor was speaking to him.

"Mr. Morrison, I want you to visit a house near here. Mr. Jones and Mr. Waldemar will come along; you know

them, perhaps. Please don't protest. I positively will not take a refusal. We have a motor-car waiting."

Furious, but not daring to refuse, Morrison found himself whirled swiftly away, and after a few turns to shake off the crowd, into Spencer Street. With his captors, he mounted to the third floor of an old frame house. The rear room door had been broken in. Inside stood a strange instrument, resembling a large camera, which had once stood upright on a steel tripod riveted to the floor. The legs of the tripod were twisted and bent. A half-demolished chair nearby suggested the agency of destruction.

"Just to render it harmless," explained Average Jones. "It formerly pointed through that window, so that a bullet from the barrel would strike that pole 'way yonder in Harrison Street, after first passing through an intervening body. Yours, for instance, Governor."

"Do I understand that this is a gun, Mr. Jones?" asked that official.

"Of a sort," replied the Ad-Visor, opening up the camera-box and showing a large barrel superimposed on a smaller one. "This is a sighting-glass," he explained, tapping the larger barrel. "And this," tapping the smaller, "carries a small but efficient bullet. This curious sheath"—he pointed to a cylindrical jacket around part of the rifle barrel—"is a Coulomb silencer, which reduces a small-arm report almost to a whisper. Here is an electric button which was connected with yonder battery before I operated on it with the chair, and distributed its spark, part to the gun, part to the flash-light powder on this little shelf. Do you see the plan now? The instant that the governor, riding through the street yonder, is sighted through this glass, the operator presses the button, and flash-light and bullet go off instantaneously."

"But why the flash-light?" asked the governor.

"Merely a blind to fool the landlady and avert any possible suspicion. They had told her that they had a new invention to take flash-lights at a distance. Amidst the other flashes, this one wouldn't be noticed particularly. They had covered their trail well."

"Well, indeed," said the governor. "May I congratulate you, Mr. Morrison, on this interesting achievement in ballistics?"

"As there is no way of properly resenting an insult from a man in your position," said Morrison venomously, "I will reserve my answer to that outrageous suggestion."

"Meantime," put in Average Jones, "let me direct your attention to a simple mathematical formula." He drew from his pocket an envelope on which were drawn some angles, subjoined by a formula. Morrison waved it aside.

"Not interested in mathematics?" asked Average Jones solicitously. "Very well, I'll elucidate informally. Given a bullet hole in a telegraph pole at a certain distance, a bullet scar on an iron girder at a certain lesser distance, and the length of a block from here to Harrison Avenue—which I paced off while you were skillfully ordering luncheon, Waldemar—and an easy triangulation brings us direct to this room and to two fugitive gentlemen with whom—I mention the hypothesis with all deference, Mr. Morrison—you are probably acquainted."

"And who may they have been?" retorted Morrison contemptuously.

"I don't know," said Average Jones.

"Then, sir," retorted the racing king, "your hypothesis is as impudent as your company is intolerable. Have you anything further to say to me?"

"Yes. It would greatly please Mr. Waldemar to publish in to-morrow's paper an authorized statement from you to the effect that the Personal Liberty bill will be withdrawn permanently."

"Mr. Waldemar may go to the devil. *I* have endured all the hectoring I propose to. Men in my position are targets for muckrakers and blackmailers—"

"Wait a moment," Waldemar's heavy voice broke in. "You speak of men in your position. Do you understand just what position you are in at present?"

Morrison rose. "Governor Arthur," he said with stony dignity, "I bid you good evening."

Waldemar set his bulky back against the door. The lips

drew back from Morrison's strong teeth with the snarl of an animal in the fury and terror of approaching peril.

"Do you know Nick Karboe?"

Morrison whirled about to face Average Jones. But he did not answer the question. He only stared.

"Carroll Morrison," continued Average Jones in his quiet drawl, "the half-hour before he—er—committed suicide—er—Nick Karboe spent in the office of the—er—*Universal* with Mr. Waldemar and—er—myself. Catch him, Waldemar!"

For Morrison had wilted. They propped him against the wall and he, the man who had insolently defied the laws of a great commonwealth, who had bribed legislators and bossed judges and browbeaten the public, slobbered, denied and begged. For two disgustful minutes they extracted from him his solemn promise that henceforth he would keep his hands off the laws. Then they turned him out.

"Suppose you enlighten me with the story, gentlemen," suggested the governor.

Average Jones told it, simply and modestly. At the conclusion, Governor Arthur looked from the wrecked camera-gun to the mathematical formula which had fallen to the floor.

"Mr. Jones," he said, "you've done me the service of saving my life; you've done the public the service of killing a vicious bill. I wish I could thank you more publicly than this."

"Thank you, Governor," said Average Jones modestly. "But I owed the public something, you know, on account of my uncle, the late Mayor Van Reypen."

Governor Arthur nodded. "The debt is paid," he said. "That knowledge must be your reward; that and the consciousness of having worked out a remarkable and original problem."

"Original?" said Average Jones, eying the diagram on the envelope's back, with his quaint smile. "Why, Governor, you're giving me too much credit. It was worked out by one of the greatest detectives of all time, some two thousand years ago. His name was Euclid."

H. C. BAILEY

THE LITTLE HOUSE

MRS. PEMBERTON always calls it providential. She is not the only one. But when he hears her say so Mr. Fortune looks at her with a certain envy. It is one of the few cases which have frightened him.

The hand of providence, Mrs. Pemberton is convinced, sent her to Mr. Fortune: and she only just caught him. He was, with reluctance, leaving his fire to go to Scotland Yard about the man who died in Kensington Gardens when her card was brought to him. "I was to tell you Mrs. Warnham sent her, sir," the parlor maid explained.

Mr. Fortune went down to receive a little old lady dressed like Queen Victoria. She had a rosy round face and a lot of white hair. Her manner was not royal but very feminine. "Mr. Fortune! How good of you to help me! Mrs. Warnham said you would." She clasped his hands. "You were so beautiful with her."

"Mrs. Warnham is too kind—"

"You saved her dear boy's life."

"I hope it's nothing like that," said Mr. Fortune anxiously.

Mrs. Pemberton wiped her eyes and the white lilac on her black bonnet shook. "No, indeed. My darling Vivian is quite well. But she has lost her kitten, Mr. Fortune!"

Mr. Fortune controlled his emotions. "I'm so sorry. I'm afraid kittens aren't much in my way."

Her nice face looked distress. "I know. That's what I said to Mrs. Warnham. I told her you wouldn't want to

(Copyright, 1927, by E. P. Dutton & Company, New York, and by Methuen & Company, London, England.)

be bothered with it, you would only laugh at me, like the police."

"But I'm not laughing," said Reggie.

"Please don't." Her nice voice was anxious. "She said I was to go and tell you I was really troubled and you would listen."

"She was quite right."

"I am dreadfully troubled." She wrung her little hands. "You see, it's the strange way it went and the people next door are so peculiar and I know the police don't take it seriously. The officer was quite civil and attentive, but he smiled, you know, Mr. Fortune, he just smiled at me."

"I know," said Reggie. "They do smile. I've felt it myself."

"Don't they," Mrs. Pemberton sighed. "Mrs. Warnham said you would understand."

"Yes. Yes. She's very kind. Perhaps if you began at the beginning."

Mrs. Pemberton had difficulty over that. Her nice mind worked on the theory that everybody knew all about her. The facts when patiently extracted and put in order by Reggie took this shape. She was a widow, her only son was a general commanding in India. She lived in Elector's Gate, one of those streets of big Victorian houses by the park. Her granddaughter Vivian, aged six, had lately come to live with her and brought a gray Persian kitten. With care and pains a garden had been persuaded to bloom behind the house. There Vivian and her kitten were playing when the kitten went over the wall. Vivian scrambled up high enough to look over and saw it in the paved yard of the house next door, saw a little girl run out of that house, snatch up the kitten and run in again. Vivian called to her and was not answered. Vivian came weeping to Mrs. Pemberton. Mrs. Pemberton put on her bonnet and called at the house next door. She was told that nobody had been out at the back, no kitten had come in, they had no kitten, her granddaughter must have made a mistake. They were not at all nice about it.

"Who are they?" said Reggie.

It was Miss Cabot. Miss Cabot and her father lived there. She did not really know them, only to bow to. But they had been there quite a long while, a dozen years or more, very quiet people, perfect neighbors, never the least trouble till this dreadful thing. But of course Mrs. Pemberton couldn't let them take Vivian's kitten. She went to the police station and complained. And the police wouldn't take it seriously at all.

Mr. Fortune, with her innocent blue eyes upon him, contrived to do that. It has been remarked by the envious that he has great success with old ladies. Mrs. Pemberton went away murmuring that he had been so kind. He was left wondering how long she would think so. It did not seem to him a case over which the police would be persuaded to lose much sleep. But it had points which occupied his mind as he drove down to Scotland Yard.

He was late for his appointment. "Ye gentlemen of England who sit at home at ease!" the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department rebuked him. "This luncheon habit is growing on you, Fortune!" He pointed an accusing finger at Reggie's girth.

"It wasn't lunch," said Reggie with indignation. "I've had a most difficult and interestin' case."

Lomas sat up. "Difficult, was it? Come along then. Avery's full of ideas about it. What was the cause of death?"

Reggie stared at him. Reggie looked at Inspector Avery and murmured: "How are you?" Reggie stared again at Lomas. "Cause of death? Oh, ah. You mean the man found in Kensington Gardens."

"That is what I'm talking about," said Lomas with some bitterness. "That happens to be what we're here for."

"Nothing in it. He died from exposure."

"Exposure, sir?" Inspector Avery was disappointed. "Just being out on a spring night?"

"Takin' the winds of March," Reggie shrugged. "He wasn't a good life. Badly nourished. Rotten heart. Noth-

ing much good about him. Drug habits—and other errors. Who was he?"

"In the foreign restaurant business, sir. Lots of money. Quite a big man in his own line. Why he should go and lie down in the gardens to die beats me."

Reggie shrugged again. "He just got there and got no farther. No vitality in him. He'd go out at a breath."

"You said something about drugs, sir?"

"Oh, he wasn't drugged when he died. Probably he had run out of his dope and life wasn't worth living. And the night frost finished him."

Lomas lay back. "That clears him up, Avery. You can go home to tea."

But Inspector Avery was not satisfied. "Mr. Fortune was worried about something, sir?"

"Yes, yes. Most interesting case. Is Elector's Gate in your division?"

"That's right, sir."

"What do you know about Mrs. Pemberton's Persian kitten?"

Lomas put up his eyeglass. "My dear fellow!" he protested.

Inspector Avery also felt a shock to his dignity. "They don't come to me about kittens, sir."

"They come to me," said Reggie sadly. "It wasn't you that smiled, then?"

"Sir?"

"Mrs. Pemberton says she went to the station and they only smiled. Quite sweet but smiling. It hurts her."

"I do remember hearing talk of it," Inspector Avery admitted. "The lady was so pathetic. But they did the usual, sir, sent a sergeant round to the house where the kitten was supposed to have gone in. The lady there said they hadn't got it. Her little niece did try to catch it, but it got away. We couldn't do any more."

Reggie lit a cigar. " 'Her little niece did try to catch it,' " he repeated slowly. "Now that's very interesting." He gazed at the puzzled inspector through smoke.

"It might be if I knew anything about it," Lomas grumbled. "Why this devotion to kittens, Reginald?"

So Reggie told him the story Mrs. Pemberton had told.

"Very, very sad," Lomas sighed. "But kittens will be cats. What do you want me to do? Leave a card with deep sympathy and regret?"

Reggie shook his head. "Not one of our good listeners," he said sadly. "Didn't you notice anything? You're not taking this seriously, Lomas. When Mrs. Pemberton called about the kitten, Miss Cabot said no one had been out at the back. When the police called, she said her little niece did try to catch it."

Lomas put up his eyeglass. "Aha! The case looks black indeed!" said he. "Miss Cabot didn't know about the little niece at first and found out afterwards. A deep, dark woman, Fortune," and he smiled.

"Yes. A facetious force, the police force," Reggie nodded. "That's what annoyed Mrs. Pemberton. And now do you mind thinking? A dear old lady calls very distressed and says Miss Cabot's little girl has caught her kitten and Miss Cabot says there wasn't any little girl and bundles her out. Why so curt? Because there was a little girl and there was a kitten." He turned on Inspector Avery. "Did your sergeant see the little girl?"

"No, sir. No occasion. He saw Miss Cabot, who was quite definite the kitten got away."

"Yes. Marked anxiety to know nothing about the kitten. Elusive little girl."

"My dear Reginald!" Lomas protested. "There's a dozen obvious explanations. The woman doesn't like cats. The little girl is a naughty little girl. The woman doesn't want to be bothered."

"No. She doesn't want to be bothered. That's what struck me."

"I fear your dear Mrs. Pemberton is a little fussy, Reginald."

"That isn't your complaint, Lomas," Reggie said

sharply. "Well, well. Sorry I don't interest you." He nodded to Avery and went out.

Avery looked at Lomas with some concern. "That's all right," Lomas laughed. "Wonderful fellow. But he will see things that aren't there."

"I wish he'd been more interested in that death in the Gardens," said Avery sadly.

"Too ordinary, my dear fellow, too ordinary for Mr. Fortune."

"This kitten business rather put me off." Avery was thoughtful. "I suppose we ought to have seen the little girl."

"Good gad!" said Lomas. "You run along home and have a nice quiet night. I don't want my inspectors seeing things."

But Inspector Avery did not go home. He had a conscience. He went back to the police station of his division.

Mr. Fortune also has an active conscience. He went to Elector's Gate. It is maintained by Superintendent Bell and others of his devoted admirers that he has a queer power of divining the people behind facts, a sort of sixth sense. At this he would jeer. His own account of himself is that he is so ordinary anything which isn't ordinary disturbs him. From the first he felt the vanishing of the kitten was queer. But the only credit he takes for the case, which they call one of his best, is that he brought to it a perfectly open mind. The rest was merely obedience to the rule of scientific inquiry, that one ought to try everything.

What there was to try in Elector's Gate, he had no notion. He left his car by the park and strolled down that majestically Victorian street. The range of stucco fronts was broken on one side by an opening which led to a dead wall. In this recess two little red brick houses faced each other, neat and prim, hiding behind the solemn mansions of the rest of Elector's Gate. At one corner of the opening stood Mrs. Pemberton's house. Then Miss Cabot's next door—Miss Cabot's was that little house behind it in the recess. Reggie rubbed his chin.

So Miss Cabot did not live in the way suggested by an address in Elector's Gate. Quite a small place, a one or two servant house. Nice and quiet too. No traffic. No neighbors on one side. Retiring folk, the Cabots.

Reggie rang Mrs. Pemberton's bell. He had hardly been shown into her dowdy comfortable drawing-room when she hurried in crying: "Dear Mr. Fortune! But how good of you! Have you found out anything?"

"No. I came to see what I could find here."

"Oh, but I'm so glad! Such a queer thing has happened. Let me show you." She led him away into a little sitting-room and took from a drawer in the writing-table a piece of coarse blue paper. "Look! When I came back from you that was lying in the garden."

Reggie laid it on the table. It was a queer shape, it had a rough black line round the edges.

"You see. It's meant for a kitten!"

"Yes. It's meant for a kitten," said Reggie gravely. "Somebody drew a kitten on packing paper—with a piece of coal—and then tore the paper along the line—so as to make a paper kitten. Somebody who's not very old." He shivered a little. "Has your little granddaughter seen it?"

"No, Vivian was out when we found it. She has gone to a party. I was rather glad, you know. It seemed mean to tease her."

Reggie folded the paper and put it in his pocket-book. His round face was pale and angry.

"Oh, did you want to talk to her about it?" Mrs. Pemberton fluttered.

"I don't want anyone to talk to her about it."

"I'm so glad. Vivian is only six, you see, and—"

"And nobody but Vivian has ever seen the little girl next door?"

"Why no. I never thought of it like that. No, indeed. We didn't know there was a little girl. Oh, but Mr. Fortune, I'm sure there was if Vivian said so."

"Did Vivian notice what she was like?"

"Poor child, she was so distressed," Mrs. Pemberton

apologized for her. "She said it was a nasty, dirty little girl. Children will talk like that, you know, when they're upset. It doesn't mean anything."

Reggie did not answer. He walked to the window. Mrs. Pemberton's garden was a pleasant place of crazy paving and rock plants. The little house next door had a bare, paved yard.

"Oh, wouldn't you like to go out?" Mrs. Pemberton cried. "I could show you just where the paper fell."

"No, I won't go out." Reggie turned away. "Good-by, Mrs. Pemberton. Don't let anyone talk to anybody. Don't let anybody know who I am. Don't let Vivian think about the business."

"Mr. Fortune! You mean there's something dreadful?"

"The worst of it for Vivian is that she's lost a kitten. There's nothing else to trouble you."

"But you're troubled about something."

"Yes, that's what I'm for," said Mr. Fortune. "Good-by."

It was an hour which Lomas is wont to give to his club. He was before the smoking-room fire, he was pronouncing the doom of the last new play, when Reggie looked round the door, caught his eye and vanished. Lomas went after him at leisure. He was in the hall, tapping an impatient foot. "My dear fellow, what's the matter? Has the kitten had foul play?"

"Come on," said Reggie.

Lomas came on with his usual studied jauntiness, to be thrust into a car and driven away at Reggie's side. "Why this stealthy haste, Reginald?" he protested. "Why thus abduct my blameless youth? Miserable man, where are you taking me?"

Mr. Fortune was not amused. "We're going to Avery's damned police station," he said. He spread out on his knee the blue paper. "That's why."

"Good gad!" Lomas groaned. "A kitten! An infant's effort at creating a kitten. Oh, my dear Reginald!"

"Yes. An infant's effort at creating a kitten," Reggie

repeated. "Exactly that. That's what frightened me. It was flung over into Mrs. Pemberton's garden this afternoon."

"Tut, tut. Not quite nice. Designed, I fear, to harrow the feelings of the bereaved."

Reggie drew a long breath. "Do you mind not being funny?" he said in a low voice. "I'm scared."

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow! What on earth for?"

"For the child who made that." Reggie put it away again. "My God, don't you feel it? There's something devilish in that little house."

Lomas was shaken. Strong language is very rare on the lips of Reggie Fortune. "I can't say I feel anything," he said slowly. "What do you want to do?"

"See Avery about the people. Here we are."

Inspector Avery was still at the station. Inspector Avery showed no surprise at seeing them. "I told you to go home, young fellow," said Lomas.

"Yes, sir. I know. I was a bit worried about that kitten case."

"Oh, you were, were you? Mr. Fortune's got it very bad."

Avery's keen face turned to Reggie. "About the little girl, sir?" he said eagerly.

"Yes, yes. What do you know about the little girl?"

"Nobody knows anything. That's just it. It don't look right to my mind."

"No. It isn't right," said Reggie. "Send two men to watch the house."

"I've put one there, sir."

"The deuce you have!" Lomas exclaimed.

"Good. But we'll have two, please. One to follow if the child's taken away. One to stand by whatever happens. The constable on the beat must keep in touch with them."

"Right, sir. Just a moment." Avery went out with visible satisfaction to give the orders.

"You won't mind me, will you?" said the Chief of the

Criminal Investigation Department with some bitterness. "But aren't you going rather fast, Fortune?"

"No. We're going far too slow."

"I can't let you commit the police to anything, you know."

"I know. You like a crime finished before you begin. Mr. Lomas, his theory of police work. Well, I've committed you to watching a suspected house. Ever heard of that being done before?"

Lomas, however, kept his temper. "You can have it watched, if it amuses you. But there's no reasonable ground for suspicion."

"Oh my aunt!" Reggie murmured.

Avery bustled in. "I've got that done, sir. Now is there anything else?"

"Yes, I'm not satisfied there's anything in it," said Lomas sharply. "What have you got against these people, Avery?"

"Mr. Lomas touches the spot," Reggie nodded. "Who are these people, Avery?"

"Ah, that's what I'd like to know," said Inspector Avery with relish. "Very retiring people, sir. Kind of secluded."

"Retiring be hanged," Lomas cried. "You've nothing against them but this stuff about a kitten and a girl."

"Pretty queer stuff, isn't it, sir? Girl is seen taking a kitten, owner of the kitten is told nobody there saw it, we're told the girl did see it, like I said. But there's more to it than that. Nobody round there knew there was a little girl in that house, nobody's ever seen her, nobody's heard of her."

"Why should they?"

"Ever lived next door to a house with a child, Lomas?" said Reggie wearily. "You notice it. But Mrs. Pemberton lives next door and she didn't know there was a child in that house."

"Nobody knew. They won't hardly believe it," said Avery.

"How the deuce can you tell?"

Avery smiled. "The men get to know the servants in their beats, sir. I've had some inquiries made. That house, there's Miss Cabot, handsome lady not so young as she was, and her father and an old married couple o' servants very stand-offish. Been there a dozen years, living very quiet, never any guests and as for a child—well, the servants in Elector's Gate laugh at it. If there is a child, they keep her in the cupboard, one of 'em said. But there is, Miss Cabot owned up to her."

"There was a child," said Reggie gravely, and took out the blue paper kitten.

Inspector Avery gasped at it. "Kind of uncanny, sir." He puzzled over it. "I don't know what to make of it, sir."

"There was a child in that little house wanted to create a kitten. She only had packing paper, she only had a bit of coal to draw with, she had no scissors to cut it out. This was the best she could do. She wanted to tell that other child next door something about her kitten. She threw this over the wall."

"I don't like it, sir."

"What's it all come to?" Lomas cried. "There's a lonely child playing tricks."

Reggie turned on him. "There is a child in that little house living a queer life. And the only paper she can get hold of came off a parcel. It happened to be a parcel of scientific apparatus."

"Are you sure about that, sir?" Avery cried eagerly.

"This is the sort of stuff they always use for glass." Reggie fingered it. "Look at the scrap of a label: 'ette & Co.' That's Burette's. First-class firm. What are the Cabots doing in that little house that they want glass from Burette's and keep a child shut up and squalid and miserable?"

"Squalid?" Lomas took up the word.

"The Pemberton child saw her. She was dirty."

"The house is kept is clean as a pin, they say," Avery frowned.

"Yes. Quite clean. And the hidden child is nasty and dirty."

"And they're at some scientific work. Do you think they're doing experiments on the child, sir?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything. But I'm frightened."

"We've got 'em all right, whatever their game is," Avery said fiercely.

"And the child?" Reggie murmured.

Lomas stood up. "You win," he said. "Sorry, Reginald. My error. Well, I haven't wasted much time. We'll go through with it now. First points to work on, who are the Cabots and what is it that Burette's send them? They're to be watched wherever they go, Avery—and their servants. I'll put Bell on to the case to-night. Report to him. We can deal with Burette's in half an hour in the morning. Anything else, Reginald?"

"Yes. You might find out if anybody lost a little girl some time ago."

Lomas shrugged. "We can look up the records. Rather an off-chance, isn't it? Whoever she is, they'd get hold of her quietly, these quiet people."

"Oh, it isn't ordinary kidnapping," Reggie said wearily. "I say, Avery, for God's sake don't let the Cabots know they're being watched. They might do the child in to-night."

"Good Lord, sir! No, I don't think it. If they know they're watched they'd know they couldn't get away with a murder."

"We might not be able to prove murder. He's a man of science, Mr. Cabot is. Warn your men to be careful."

"We can't have a search-warrant on this evidence." Lomas frowned. "We can't do anything to-night. Begad, I'll have somebody get into the house in the morning."

"Yes, I'm going," said Reggie.

"My dear fellow!"

"You want a doctor to see that child."

That night lives in the memory of Mr. Fortune. He could not sleep. It is a condition otherwise unknown to him. He drove early to Scotland Yard and found Superintendent Bell fresh and hearty from a night watch.

"You've got something, Mr. Fortune. They're queer folk, these Cabots. Where do you think they went last night? Night club, if you please. The Doodah Club. Yes, the old man and the woman living in that quiet style, they go off to the Doodah which is about as hot as we've got. Well, as soon as I heard they were there, I sent round one of the night club experts. He knew the Cabots by sight right enough. They're pretty regular at the Doodah. He made out that Cabot is known there as Smithson and runs some sort of an accountant's business in Soho. Nothing on our books against him. But we're looking into Smithson & Co., of course."

"Yes. Have you found anything about a lost child?"

Bell shook his head. "We've got no record of any to fit this little girl. Not many children get lost nowadays. I'm still looking about. But it's a bit of a long shot, sir."

"I know. And Burette's?"

"Harland's on that, sir. We'll know all about their end of the business before lunch."

"Now who's going with me to the house? I want some fellow with a nerve and lots of chat."

Superintendent Bell looked at him with solicitude. "Are you set on going yourself, sir? If you don't mind my saying so—"

"I do," Reggie smiled.

"Well, I knew you would," Bell sighed. "You can't do better than Avery, sir. He's a little bull-terrier."

"Yes. I thought that myself. But is he chatty?"

"He can keep it up. He's a politician."

"Oh my aunt!" said Reggie.

Some time later two men in the uniform of the inspectors of the Metropolitan Water Board strolled into Elector's Gate. A street sweeper asked one of them for a match and over his cigarette remarked: "All out but the woman servant. Cabot and Miss Cabot went off together. The man servant's gone to the pub."

The water inspectors strolled on. "That's a bit of luck, sir," said Avery.

"No. That's Bell making a fuss down at Smithson & Co. I thought he would draw 'em. Your fellows said the man-servant was in the pub till it closed. I thought he'd be on the doorstep when it opened—if master was out of the way. Now then. Lots of patter, please."

Avery rang the tradesmen's bell of the little house. After some minutes the side door opened to display a gaunt woman in black who scowled. Avery was sorry to trouble her, but they were going over the water fittings. She objected. Avery was very sorry, regular inspection, must go through with it, the law was the law. "Constable over there, mum, go and ask him if you like." They were admitted. "All the taps, please, then the run of the pipes, then the cistern. All fittings. Now then, where's the main?" He listened professionally. "Ah, I thought so. Just have a look at the scullery, mate. Now, mum, upstairs if you please." He swept her on before him, still talking about water and the law.

Reggie went into the kitchen, crossed to the scullery and turned on taps so that a noise of splashing water arose and came back to the kitchen. He called out, "Taps running, mate," and was answered: "Right-o! Stand by the main," and heard Avery in continuous eloquence and the servant grumbling. He went swiftly from room to room, such rooms as upholsterers furnish to their own taste, and saw no child's gear nor any mark that a child would make. He could hear Avery moving about upstairs arguing about the lead of pipes and having doors opened. Avery was not missing anything. "Hallo, mate!" Avery called. "Try the main tap. Now up to the cistern if you please, mum." Talking, he climbed.

Reggie stood in the hall. There was a cupboard under the stairs. He opened that, saw darkness and in darkness the gleam of eyes. He went in. "My dear," he said gently. "What's your name?"

There was no answer but panting breath.

He switched on an electric torch and saw a little girl cowering in the corner. Her face was pinched and dirty,

she seemed to have no body so she was huddled shrinking from him.

"I'm friends," said Reggie and reached for her hand. "It's all right." His fingers moved along the lean bare arm, about her neck. "Where's the kitten?"

Her face shook. "It died. It did. It's in the dust," she gasped.

"I'm friends," Reggie said again. "Wait: just wait. It's all right."

He shut off the torch and slipped out of the cupboard. The feet of Avery were heavy on the stair.

"I say, mate. Waste pipes at the back," Reggie called.

"Have a look at 'em, Bill. Have a look at 'em," said Avery and held the gaunt woman in conversation in the hall.

Reggie went out to the paved yard. While he watched the scullery window his arm slid into the dustbin and brought out a bass basket. He buttoned that into his jacket and came back calling, "That's all right, mate. Shall I shut off the taps?"

"Shut 'em off, Bill. Come on. Good day, mum. Sorry to trouble you. Duty is duty."

The gaunt woman grumbling about a lot of fuss and nonsense slammed the door on them.

A chauffeur came out of the bonnet of his car as they passed him. "Watch it. Watch it," Avery muttered and hurried on. It was hard work to keep up with Reggie.

He made for a post office and telling Avery to get a taxi shut himself into the telephone box. "Superintendent Bell? Fortune speaking. What have you got about the Cabots? Somebody interviewing them at the Smithson & Co. Office? Let him keep 'em busy. Child in the house in danger of foul play. Yes. Death. Instant danger. I want a search-warrant quick. Right. At my house." He joined Avery in the taxi and they drove away.

"No sign of the child, sir," Avery began. "But there was—"

"I saw the child," said Reggie. "She's still alive. I got

the kitten too. He isn't." The bass basket was produced and from it the stiff cold body of a Persian kitten.

"Dead, eh? Looks all right too. Did it die natural, sir?"

Reggie pointed to the eyes. "No. Not natural. There isn't much natural in that house." He shivered.

"What did they want to kill it for?"

"What do they want to keep the child in a dark cupboard for?"

"Had her there when we came, I reckon."

"Yes. She's out sometimes. But she's used to the dark."

"The devils," said Avery heartily. "But what is the game, sir? Scientific experiments? There was a room I couldn't get into. The woman said the master had the key. But I made out it had water laid on."

"Yes. Laboratories have." The taxi turned into Wimpole Street and stopped. "You go on to the Yard and see Bell. I've got to look into the kitten." But he went first to the telephone and talked to his hospital and asked for a certain nurse.

He was in his own clothes again; he was eating lunch without appetite when Bell came. "Got the warrant?" He started up. "Good. Where are the Cabots?"

"I couldn't say for the moment, sir. Our fellows had orders to keep 'em talking as long as they could. But there wasn't anything much to go on. That business looks all right. They do accountants' work for the foreign restaurants."

"The man who died in Kensington Gardens," Reggie murmured.

"Good Lord, sir!" Bell stared. "He was in the restaurant trade, sure enough. And he was a drug fiend, you said."

"Come on, come on. I want to get back to that child before the Cabots."

But as soon as the car was moving Bell returned to his point. "About the drugs, sir. What did you make of the house this morning? Avery said there was a room might be

a laboratory. Burette's say they've been supplying Mr. Cabot with laboratory glassware for years."

"Yes. I think we shall find a laboratory. The kitten has been drugged. The little girl has been drugged."

"What's their game, sir? Some kind of scientific experiments with drugs?"

Reggie shuddered. "They've been making experiments. Not for science. For the devil. They killed the kitten because she liked it. And she made her paper kitten to tell the other little girl it was gone. Silly, isn't it?" He laughed nervously. "This car's damned slow, Bell."

"We're almost there, sir."

"Almost! Nice word, almost! My God!"

"Steady, sir, steady." Bell laid an anxious hand on his arm. "I want you, you know. I'll ask for the child first."

The car swung into Elector's Gate and stopped just short of the recess in which the little house stood. As Bell sprang out a large man on the pavement met him. "Both of 'em drove straight here from the office, sir. Only just gone in."

Bell strode on to the house and rang and rang again. It was some while before the door moved. Then it opened only a little way and a man's flabby face with watery eyes looked around it. "I am a police officer. I have a warrant to enter this house." Bell pushed the door back and went in with Reggie and on their heels two large men followed. Silent and adroit they took the manservant and put him into the street where careful hands received him, and shut the door.

Bell stood still in the hall listening. There was a murmur of voices in one of the rooms. Its door opened. The gaunt woman came out. "Well?" she said defiantly. "Who may you be?"

The large man swept her aside. Bell and Reggie went into the room.

Two people were in it. A plump old man, neatly professional in his clothes, with a large brown face under his white hair, the face of a clever fellow who enjoyed his life, a woman darker than he, black-haired, black-browed,

a woman on a large scale who might have been handsome before she was full-blown. She looked at them with gleaming eyes, and the lines were deep about her big mouth. She laughed, a shrill sound that began suddenly and suddenly ended.

"What is all this, gentlemen?" the man said.

"Mr. and Miss Cabot, alias Smithson?" Bell inquired.

"My name is Cabot and this is my daughter. The name of my firm is Smithson & Co. But you have the advantage of me."

"I am Superintendent Bell. I have a warrant to search your house."

"Very good of the police to take this interest in me. May I ask why?"

"I want the child you have here."

Mr. Cabot looked at his daughter. "Oh, our poor little darling," he said slowly.

"What's her name?" Bell snapped.

"I beg your pardon?" Mr. Cabot suddenly became aware of him. "Her name? Why, Grace of course."

"Grace of course?"

"Grace Cabot, sir. I see that you don't know our family tragedy. My poor son's child is mentally defective. Practically imbecile. It has—"

"Since she came here or before?"

Mr. Cabot licked his lips. "I see that you have picked up some scandal. She was—"

"Where is she?"

"Oh, I'll find her for you," Miss Cabot cried.

But Reggie was at the door first. He went before her into the hall. Miss Cabot followed him and calling "Grace, Grace," ran upstairs.

A moment he stood, then pointed and one of the large men went heavily after her. Reggie moved to the cupboard under the stairs and unlocked it and looked into the dark. "I'm friends," he said very gently. "Come, dear. I'm friends." And above Miss Cabot's shrill voice called "Grace! Grace!"

He could see something faintly white. He heard a

moan. "It's all over now," he said. "All right now. Friends, just friends."

"Grace! Grace!" the shrill voice came nearer.

"No, no, no," the child sobbed in the dark.

Reggie went in, groped for her and gathered her into his arms. She was very frail. "My dear," he whispered. She was carried out into the light, shaking, trying to hide her dirty dress.

Miss Cabot ran down the stairs, "So you've found the dear creature!" she cried. Her arms shot out.

Reggie swung on his heel, offering her a solid shoulder. "Hold her wrist," he said.

The large man behind her had both arms in a grip that brought a scream out of her. A syringe fell tinkling to the floor. And Miss Cabot began to swear.

"Take the child out of this," Reggie said fiercely. "Take her to my place." But she nestled up against him and moaned. "All right. All right. Get the woman off." Handcuffs snapped upon Miss Cabot's wrists while she bit and struggled and blasphemed. She was thrust out to the ready hands in the street.

"A beauty, she is," one of the large men muttered.

And then silence came down upon the house. The child felt it, raised her wan starved face from Reggie's shoulder. "Is she gone?" she murmured, looked about her, saw nothing but those solid, comfortable men and listened again to the silence. "Weally, weally gone?"

"Really gone. She'll never hurt you any more," Reggie said. "There's only friends for you now. You're coming home with me. Nice home. But just wait a minute. This man will hold you quite safe." He persuaded her to go to the arms of one of the detectives. "Take her out into the air at the back. I shan't be long, dear."

He picked up the syringe carefully, he turned into the room where Bell watched Cabot. The old man stood by the window looking out. His face was yellow. But he had control of his nerves and his voice. "Perhaps you will tell me what all this means, superintendent?" he was saying.

"You'll hear what it means all right," Bell growled.

"I see my daughter arrested—"

"Yes. She didn't like it, did she?" Reggie spoke to hurt.

The old man swung round. "Who is this person, pray?"

"That's Mr. Fortune."

"Oh, the great Mr. Fortune! Why trouble him with our poor affairs?"

"A pleasure," said Reggie.

"So happy to interest you! And will you be good enough to tell me why you have arrested my daughter?"

"We've found a child in your house who has been tortured."

"I suppose she told you so," the old man chuckled. "Good evidence you have found, Mr. Fortune. The child's an imbecile."

"We shan't use her evidence," said Reggie. "You won't torture her any more, Mr. Cabot."

The old man grinned. "Is the child dead, sir?" Bell cried.

Reggie did not answer for a moment. He was watching the old man's face. "No," he said slowly. "Oh no. Miss Cabot tried to kill her just now. But it didn't happen."

The old man was breathing hard. "A poor story, isn't it?" he sneered. "You won't make much of it in court, Mr. Fortune. Is that all, pray?"

"No. I should like to see your laboratory."

"My laboratory? Oh, that's too kind of you! A very humble little place where I play with chemical experiments. Do you really want to see it?"

"We're going to see it," said Bell.

"But I shall be delighted to show you."

Bell looked at Reggie who nodded. The old man went upstairs between them. He unlocked a door and they came into a room fitted with a long bench and shelves and sink and much chemical apparatus. Reggie moved to and fro looking at the array of bottles, opening cupboards. There were many things which interested him.

"Ah, do you like that?" The old man came forward as he lingered by an arrangement of flasks and glass tubes. "It's a method of my own." He became technical, skilled fingers moved demonstrating. "And here,"—he turned

away and opened a drawer and bent over it,—"here you see—"

"Yes. I see," said Reggie and caught the hand that was going to his mouth.

Bell took the old man in his solid grip. The hand was opened and produced a white pellet.

"Not that way, Mr. Cabot," said Reggie. "Not yet."

"You go where your daughter's gone," said Bell and called to the detective in the hall.

"I shall have some things to think of, gentlemen," the old man grinned as he was led away.

"You will. And plenty of time to think. In this world and the next," said Bell fiercely.

The old man laughed.

Reggie and Bell looked at each other and Reggie shivered and "Thank God," he said. He went to the window and leaned out to see the child with the big detective in the free air below.

"What was it the old scoundrel was doing here, sir? Kind of vivisecting the child?"

"Oh no, no. The little girl was a side line. He was making narcotic drugs—dope. Very neat plant."

"Turning out dope? He's been doing that for years?"

"Yes, yes. Prosperous industry."

"But why the child? For testing the drugs?"

"No. He wouldn't need her for tests. No. They drugged her for fun. You haven't got to the child's story yet. Lots of work to do yet."

"What did you want me to work on, sir?"

"Go over this place. Go over the Cabots' past. Go and look for somebody that's lost a child. Good-by."

The big detective in the yard, nursing the little girl with awkward gentleness, grinned embarrassment at Reggie. "I'm not much of a hand at this, sir. But she don't seem to like me to put her down."

"No. Nice to have somebody to hold on to, isn't it, shrimp?" Reggie touched her cheek. "Come and hold on to me." He held out his arms. For the first time he saw something like a smile on that pinched face. She swayed

towards him. "Come along. We're going to a pretty house and a kind jolly lady and everybody there is waiting to love you."

She was wrapped in a rug in Superintendent Bell's car, she sat on Reggie's knee watching the trees in the park rush by, the busy, gay streets. Suddenly she clutched at him. "Is it weal?" she cried. "Weally weal?"

"Yes. It's all real now," Reggie said and put his hand over hers. "Jolly things, real things."

When the car stopped at his house, his parlor maid had the door open before he reached it and watched him carry the child in with benign amusement which yielded to pity. "Shall I take her, sir?" she said eagerly.

"She's all right, thanks. Has Nurse Cary come?"

"Here I am, Mr. Fortune," a small buxom woman ran down the stairs. "Well!" She looked at the child. "I'm going to like you ever so much. Please like me."

It was difficult not to like those pretty pink and white cheeks, that kind voice. Again something like a smile came on the pinched, wan face.

"Oh, my dear," said Nurse Cary with tears in her voice and her eyes. She gave a glance at Mr. Fortune.

"Yes. I know," he said quickly.

"I'm going to make you so beautifully cozy," said Nurse Cary. "You just come and try." She took the child to her comfortable bosom.

Upstairs in the bathroom filthy clothes were stripped from the starved little body. But it was marked with something worse than dirt, punctured marks on the arms and here and there a rash. Nurse Cary looked at Mr. Fortune.

"Yes, I know," he said softly. "They're been giving her drugs."

"But why?"

"For fun."

"Devils," said Nurse Cary under her breath.

"Yes, I think so," said Mr. Fortune. He was handling the filthy clothes. They had been good honest stuff once. He looked close, made out a bit of tape with a name in

stitched letters—Rose Harford. He turned to the child lying in the steaming water, Nurse Cary's hands busy upon her. "Well, isn't it jolly, Rose?"

"So you're Rose, are you?" Nurse Cary smiled. "My little Rose."

"Mummy's Wose," the child murmured.

Mr. Fortune went out. The telephone called to Scotland Yard. "Is that Lomas? Fortune speaking. The child is Rose Harford. There's a mother—or was. Get on to it."

. . . . . .

The small Rose in golden pyjamas was among many pillows watching Mr. Fortune and Nurse Cary set out a farm on her bed. They were being very funny about the hens, but she did not laugh; she watched with grave, tranquil eyes and sometimes stroked her beautiful pyjamas. Mr. Fortune was called away.

At Scotland Yard he found a conference, Lomas, Bell, Avery. "My dear fellow! How's the patient?"

"She'll come through with luck. But it's a long job. They've made a vile mess of her."

"Hanging's too good for that pair," Bell sighed. "And we can't even hang 'em."

"No, no. I hope not. They'll feel what they get, quite a lot, the family Cabot."

"They've done enough to be hanged more than once," said Avery fiercely. "You remember that fellow who died in Kensington Gardens, Mr. Fortune? He used to get his drugs from Smithson & Co."

"Yes. You were right about him, Avery. I ought to have seen there was something to work on there."

Avery laughed. "You're the one that's been right, sir. Do you remember how we made fun of you about the kitten? If you hadn't taken that up, the Cabots would be playing at hell now quite happy and comfortable."

"Don't recall my awful past, Avery," Lomas said. "It's not respectful. My dear Reginald, you're a disturbing fellow. You're sapping the foundations of the criminal courts of this country."

"No flowers, by request," Reggie murmured.

"You don't work by evidence, like a reasonable man."

"My only aunt!" Reggie was annoyed. "I use nothing but evidence. That's why I don't get on with lawyers and policemen. I believe evidence, Lomas, old thing. That's what bothers you."

"You do bother me. And now will you kindly tell me the whole history of the Cabot affair?"

"Quite clear, isn't it? Cabot was a skilled chemist. The trouble in the dope trade is always to get supplies. He solved that by getting raw materials and making the stuff. He found his customers at the night clubs and the restaurants he was in touch with through the Smithson & Co. accountant business. He distributed probably by post from Smithson & Co."

"That's right, sir," Bell nodded. "We've got on the track of that now. Big trade he did. Lots of poor fools he must have sent to the devil."

"Very neat, Reginald," Lomas smiled. "You omit to explain the little girl."

"Oh, that's revenge. Revenge on somebody. Probably her father and mother."

"Did you get that out of the child?" said Lomas quickly.

"No. The child mustn't be asked anything about the past. Haven't you got that clear? No evidence from her. She mustn't come into court."

"My dear fellow, we don't want her. There's two of you to swear to attempted murder and your medical evidence. That's all right. I only wanted to know how you arrived at the mother."

"Have you found her at last?"

"Three months ago George and Rose Harford were convicted of dealing in drugs. The man is a young accountant, the woman an actress. They lived in a Bloomsbury flat and often went to one of the Soho restaurants. A waiter there gave information that the woman had been offering drugs. They were arrested. Dope was found in the pockets of the man's coat and the woman's cloak,

More dope in their flat. A clear case and they were both convicted. Some time after they were in prison the woman complained that she had heard nothing of her daughter, whom another actress in the flats had promised to look after. Well, the prison people had inquiries made for her. It took time. The actress had gone on tour. When they found her, her story was that Mrs. Harford's sister had called and taken the child away. The prison authorities told Mrs. Harford and she said she had no sister extant. So at last it worked round to us."

"Yes. At last. And you've had the mother in jail three months—wondering."

"Wondering if there was a God," said Bell solemnly.

"Well—it's a black business," Lomas shrugged. "See your way, Reginald?"

"Oh, I suppose the Cabot woman wanted George Harford herself. When he married, she looked for a chance to make the wife suffer. She bided her time. And sent father and mother to prison and took the child and tortured her. Patient woman."

"The Harfords have been out of England. The man had a job for his firm in France. They hadn't been back before this happened to them."

"What evidence have you got?"

"That drunken dog of a manservant wants to turn King's evidence. He says he was under the thumb of his wife—"

"I dare say he was. Have you seen her? Born brute."

"His story is that his wife was turned on to plant the dope in the Harford flat. The waiter put the stuff in their coat pockets while they were at dinner. We can't lay our hands on the waiter. Several people have vanished since the Cabots were taken. George Harford says he knew Miss Cabot at a night club, never knew her well, just danced with her. His wife had never seen her. Both of them always declared they knew nothing of the dope."

"Yes. Gross miscarriage of justice, Lomas."

"Clear case," Loman shrugged. "Nobody's fault."

"Yes. That's very gratifying. Great consolation for the Harfords. Cheering for the child."

"We'll do all we can, of course. Put 'em right before the world, set 'em on their feet again and all that. An unfortunate affair. Shakes confidence in police work."

Mr. Fortune stared at him. Mr. Fortune dreaw a long breath. "Yes. That is one way of looking at it," he murmured.

"Thank God for the kitten, sir," Bell said.

Mr. Fortune turned large grave eyes on him. "Yes, that's another," he said.

"I'd call it all providential," Bell said earnestly. "Just providential."

Wonder grew in Mr. Fortune's eyes. "Providential!" he said. "Well, well."

H. C. BAILEY

THE HERMIT CRAB

ONCE upon a time, Mrs. Fortune, irritated by the sight of her husband lying on his back and thinking beautiful thoughts asked him if he had ever done any work in his life. Reggie Fortune replied with dignity that he would be eternally honoured among the great benefactors of humanity for his work in the case of the hermit crab; he opened his eyes and smiled. "That is, perhaps, my masterpiece, Joan," said he.

Mrs. Fortune showed him the tip of a red tongue. "Mormon!" said she.

Yet it began innocently enough. It began, as Mrs. Fortune complains, soon after they were married. The Hon. Sidney Lomas, Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, came in to a lazy Sunday lunch, and contemplating Mrs. Fortune with artistic approval, congratulated Mr. Fortune on his knowledge of women.

"I haven't. I don't," Reggie Fortune protested. "I don't know anything about women. But I don't act as if I did. That is how I am wiser than all other men."

The Hon. Sidney Lomas shook his head. "These experts!" he sighed. "They never will tell you how they do the trick, will they, Mrs. Fortune? This profession of innocence is irritating, Reginald. How did you persuade her to marry you?"

"How did I, Joan?" Mr. Fortune murmured dreamily.

"I always wanted to be a mother to you, my dear," Mrs. Fortune explained to him. "And you were getting so fat."

"He was," Lomas agreed with enthusiasm. "Nay, more,

(From "Mr. Fortune's Trials." Copyright, 1926, by E. P. Dutton & Company, New York, and by Methuen & Company, London, England.)

he is. Are you sure that you are the right treatment for him? I think what he really needs is something sterner. I should recommend Miss Platt Robinson. Could you arrange for him to marry her, too?"

"If you think it would be for his good, Mr. Lomas," Mrs. Fortune said demurely.

"It would be for mine," Lomas sighed. "But married people are so selfish."

"Who is your lady friend, Lomas? Does she want to be a mother to you?" Mr. Fortune asked.

Lomas shuddered. "Not that! No, only a bore, not a mother. I'm afraid you haven't heard of Miss Platt Robinson, Reginald. She would be annoyed."

"Philanthropist at large, isn't she?"

"At large, unfortunately," Lomas agreed. "She is one of the earnest women who have made England what it is, Mrs. Fortune. She has lately become Superintendent of the Records Department of the Ministry of Social Welfare."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Fortune.

"I gather that isn't what the women in the Records Department call her."

"Her appointment was a shameless job, wasn't it?" Fortune smiled.

"My dear Fortune! There are no jobs in the Civil Service."

"Forgive me," Reggie said meekly. "I do not understand these things."

"Miss Platt Robinson, sir, is one of those noble women who have given their lives to good works. Whenever you hear of a scheme to prevent people doing something and make them do something else, you may be sure Miss Platt Robinson is in it up to the neck. She was born to set everybody right. She had her big chance in the War, of course. She went round lecturing mothers and housewives on the joys of sacrifice. Then she looked after the manners and morals of young women in factories. And when she had won the War, some earnest, wealthy philanthropists felt that the country had to provide for Miss Platt Robinson. So she was pushed into the Records De-

partment of the Ministry of Social Welfare. Hence these tears."

"What do they do there?" Mrs. Fortune asked.

Lomas shook his head. "No one knows. Miles of card indexes and box files and women. A dreadful place. And Miss Platt Robinson superintends."

"Having come in over the heads of all the permanent staff," Fortune murmured. "Do birds in their little nests agree, Lomas?"

"It was feared by some miserable cynics like you that there would be trouble. Old Bligh—he's secretary to the Ministry—said it was the dirtiest work in his chief's corrupt career, and he hoped and believed the women in the Records Department would tear Miss Platt Robinson limb from limb. Some of them have been in the service thirty years. You wouldn't expect them to want an outsider put over their heads. And the woman who should have been made superintendent, Miss Thornton, has worked her way up from the bottom, and I'm told she's fit to run the Empire. They all worship her."

"They ought to have made a rebellion," said Mrs. Fortune.

"I sometimes suspect you are a man, Joan," her husband sighed. "Women are conscientious. Women have a sense of duty."

"They have," Lomas agreed. "They took Miss Platt Robinson to their bosoms. All was peace. Old Bligh was much annoyed: said it convinced him women were unfit for the public service. For months all was peace." He smiled at Mrs. Fortune. "Woman is the most patient of the animals. I don't know how long it would take Miss Platt Robinson to get on a woman's nerves. But she has now begun to receive attention." He took from his pocket-book a small sheet of drawing-paper and gave it to Reggie. "A scene from bird life. Artist unknown."

Mr. Fortune looked at a sketch in water colour. "A young cuckoo ejecting a fledging hedge-sparrow from the maternal nest. Very neat and good."

"I'm not a bird fancier myself, but I grasped the allu-

sion. So did Miss Platt Robinson. She calls it a threatening letter, Reginald."

"Is this the only one?"

"No. The others are not illustrated. She had one which said: 'Did you think you could get away with it? Not so, Platty.' Several of them call her Platty, or Platter. That annoys her particularly. She has had a dozen or so. None of them very long. One said her appointment was the scandal of the century. Another said: 'We must draw the line somewhere, Platty.' That's the general tone. They get more peevish as they go on. So does Miss Platt Robinson. She don't think much of Scotland Yard. She can't understand why we haven't found somebody to hang."

"Why haven't you?" Mr. Fortune murmured.

"My dear fellow, there's three hundred women in the department. All the three hundred may be in it. My fellows tell me she's put everybody's back up. She's been meddling at large—meddled with their luncheon hours, with their catering, with their holidays. Of course, they kick!"

"I wonder," Reggie Fortune murmured. "It's not much in my way, Lomas. I like passion and gore. But there are points——" He looked affectionately at the picture of the cuckoo.

And the next morning found him at Scotland Yard. He was in time to assist at the interview between Mr. Weeley, the hoary old politician who was Minister of Social Welfare, and Lomas. Mr. Weeley came in like a lion. He was much distressed to find that the Criminal Investigation Department had done nothing to clear up this deplorable affair. He was compelled to say—many unpleasant things, and he said them at length.

"Now you've finished, sir," said Lomas placidly, "I've only to add that the staff of your ministry never gave any trouble till you appointed Miss Platt Robinson. However, if you want a criminal case over your appointment, I'll do what I can. I am laying the papers before Mr. Fortune."

"A very interesting case," Reggie smiled.

But Mr. Weeley flinched. The name of Mr. Fortune meant murders to him. "Ah, really? Really? I am quite sure you will do everything that is possible. But the important thing is to settle the matter: to restore confidence and good feeling. We mustn't have any publicity, Mr. Lomas. I realy on you, my dear sir. Absolutely!" He went out like a lamb.

"What a nuisance politicians would be if they weren't all cowards," said Lomas. "Here are the papers, Reginald."

Mr. Fortune examined a dozen letters.

They had no resemblance except in the general style, which was mysterious and humorous. The writer or writers used paper of different kinds, though all were good; the words were in script, or printed in different inks and with different pens. The letters had been posted in different parts of London; most of them in the West End. The general sense of them was that Miss Platt Robinson ought not to be superintendent and would not be superintendent long. But there was no definite threat."

"Anything strike you, Lomas?" Mr. Fortune smiled.

"Nothing to take hold of," Lomas shrugged. "Nothing criminal. Insubordinate, of course, written to the head of the department. Not a police matter."

"I wonder," Mr. Fortune said. "You know, there isn't any malice. They're not bitter, and they have humour. Very unusual anonymous letters. I would like to have a few words with Miss Platt Robinson."

Lomas sighed. "She'll have the words, Reginald."

They took a cab to the new gaunt building which is the home of the Records Department. They were led through long corridors of echoing concrete to the severe room, all whitewash and white paint, where on an island of carpet in the middle of a vast bare floor were the table and the chair of Miss Platt Robinson.

Pictures of Joan of Arc and Florence Nightingale looked down upon her. She stood up between them, a large, plump woman in a dark coat-frock. She had an extensive face, in which the eyes and the mouth stood

out, an earnest, voluble face very pleased with itself. And she began to talk. She was glad to see Mr. Lomas. She felt it extraordinary that there had been so much delay in dealing with the case. She wished to remind Mr. Lomas that she had to think not only of herself but of the women committed to her care. Attacks upon her she might afford to treat (as she did) with contempt, but it was too plain that their gross nature, their repetition, must have a deplorable influence upon the morale of the women on her staff. It was amazing to her——

"Have you told the women here all about the letters?" Lomas broke in.

Miss Platt Robinson said contemptuously that her secretary of course opened her letters.

"And you don't trust your secretary?"

"I trust everyone, Mr. Lomas. It is one of my principles. But I suppose you have some knowledge of the world. You should be aware that such things cannot be kept secret."

"If my secretary couldn't keep secrets I shouldn't keep him," Lomas said.

Miss Platt Robinson said that she was not inclined to discharge a trusted woman on a vague suspicion. She was surprised to receive such advice.

"We're not advising," said Reggie meekly. "We're asking questions. Do you suspect anyone?"

"I do not allow myself to suspect, sir. It is one of my principles."

"And very grateful and comfortin'," Mr. Fortune murmured. "But somebody painted the cuckoo. What is your theory, Miss Platt Robinson? Why did you get the bird?"

"I am convinced, sir, that we have to deal with an attempt to undermine my authority in the department."

"By whom?"

"I am not a detective, sir. It is not possible for me to watch and investigate and obtain evidence. The case has been referred to your department, and I must leave it in your hands. I never meddle. That is one of my principles."

Mr. Fortune lay back and smiled at the picture of Joan of Arc. "Thank you so much. I do like a free hand," he murmured.

Miss Platt Robinson made an impatient noise. "But I really must point out, sir, that your handling of the affair has been deplorably feeble. The attacks are being continued. Only this morning I had an outrageous thing." She opened a drawer in her table and drew out a parcel. "Kindly examine that."

Mr. Fortune looked at the address. It was in printed letters. The parcel had been posted in West London. It was made up of a tin box, which was packed with seaweed. From this he drew forth a large whelk-shell. Out of the shell protruded the front claws of a crab.

"Good Gad!" said Lomas. "What is the meaning of that, madame?"

"I wonder how you can ask me!" Miss Platt Robinson cried.

Reggie had laid down the shell and the crab. He was poking a curious finger inside the box into the seaweed which contained little lumps of red sand and shell.

"What is the thing, Fortune?" Lomas said.

Reggie looked up. His round, cherubic face was solemn.

"What? This gentleman?" He lifted the whelk-shell. "Oh, he's *pagurus Bernhardus*. A hermit crab."

"Why should the creature be sent to me?" said Miss Platt Robinson.

"The hermit crab, madame, in the inscrutable wisdom of Providence, is given a naked and tender abdomen. He is, therefore, tempted to shelter it in other people's property. He evicts the whelk and finds a safe and comfortable situation. Here you see him."

Lomas smiled. "So this is a variation on the theme of the cuckoo."

"I fear so." Reggie shook his head. "I fear so." He put the hermit crab back into the seaweed and carefully packed it up again.

"This is positively outrageous!" said Miss Platt Robinson.

Into the room came a small brisk woman. "I think you had better read these—oh, I beg your pardon. I will bring them when you're free." She was gone again. It seemed to Reggie Fortune that the frown which Miss Platt Robinson sent after her had a certain acidity.

"Well, well," he said. "And not one of these queer things has suggested to you any particular person who don't like you?"

The prominent eyes of Miss Platt Robinson stared at him. Miss Platt Robinson seemed to struggle with emotions. "It must be some one who has lost all sense of decency," she exploded. "Jealousy, I suppose." She burrowed among the papers on her desk.

Mr. Fortune lay back and winked at the picture of Florence Nightingale.

Miss Platt Robinson took up a strip of yellow paper and gazed at it eagerly. "I should advise you to compare that writing with the anonymous letters, sir," she said.

It was a note about the practice of the department. It was in a clear, bold hand.

"And who wrote this, madame?"

Miss Platt Robinson hesitated.

"I should prefer to leave you to draw your own conclusions, sir."

"We will," said Reggie. And he took up the box with the hermit crab. "It's a very interestin' case. Good morning!"

"Interesting!" Miss Platt Robinson gasped.

Outside in the long gaunt corridor Reggie and Lomas were submerged in a flood of young women going to lunch with earnest haste. " 'The female of the species is more dreadful than the male,' " Reggie murmured. "Hold my hand, Lomas, I'm frightened. They look very determined. I'm not good enough to die. What an awful place this is! A labyrinth full of women. Fancy being lost here!"

They emerged at last into sunshine and the street.

"Lunch is strongly indicated," Reggie sighed relief. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

"But why are you so rattled, Reginald?"

"How can you ask? You also were present. Something will come of this. I hope it mayn't be human gore."

"The woman's a fool," said Lomas. "Some humorist's been pulling her leg, that's all there is to it."

"I wonder. Not a nice woman, Lomas. Not really a nice woman."

"Well, I don't mind owning I shouldn't like anybody to send me a dead crab in a whelk-shell. I fear I should be peevish."

"The hermit crab upset her, didn't it? She had suspicions all right after that. Do you know the writing she gave me as a sample?"

"Confound her," said Lomas. "It's her assistant's, Miss Thornton's. She was the little woman who blew in. She's been in the office all her life. She ought to be superintendent now if she had her rights."

"Does she think so?"

"How can she help thinking so?"

"As you say," Reggie nodded. "That writing looks—possible. The anonymous letters are disguise, of course. What's Miss Thornton's reputation?"

"One of the best. Good Gad, I hope she hasn't lost her head. It would be an infernal shame if she's ruined herself over the Platt Robinson."

"Somebody's lost her head." Reggie smiled.

"You can't tell what a woman won't do when she begins to hate another woman," Lomas pronounced. "They all run mad then, even the best of them."

"Yes. Yes. There was some nasty temper about. I wonder."

"Confound you, what do you think of it yourself?"

"I don't think. I haven't enough facts. I only wonder. Very interestin' case. I wonder what they'll be up to next?"

Lomas chuckled. "It won't be easy to beat the hermit crab."

Mr. Fortune possesses the faculty of remaining awake after a large lunch. He spent the afternoon in a scientific investigation of the hermit crab, and the packing, and the

tin. In the evening his wife found him benign but pensive. In the morning she heard with regret that their chauffeur and factotum, Sam, had gone to the seaside for a day or two. Mr. Fortune offered to drive her himself. She shuddered. Reggie Fortune's driving is the triumph of mind over matter.

For some days nothing else disturbed their happiness. Mr. Fortune asking over the telephone whether Miss Platt Robinson had received any more congratulations, was told that she had gone on holiday. Sam the chauffeur came back to his job. And one morning the voice of Lomas spoke over the telephone.

"Reginald, are you there? You are quite sure you are there? You haven't eloped with Miss Platt Robinson?"

"I hadn't noticed it."

"This is very suspicious. Better come around and prove an alibi."

Sam drove Mr. Fortune to Scotland Yard.

"What is this unseemly jest, Lomas? I am a good young husband."

"Anything you say will be used as evidence against you. Now, Reggie, where is she?"

"Oh, my aunt, is she really gone?"

"The vanishing lady. A new illusion by Miss Platt Robinson. This morning Lady Bandicot—do you know Lady Bandicot?" Reggie held up his hands. Lady Bandicot is one of our most earnest social reformers. "Quite so. She came round with her tail fluffed out and her back up. She had a meeting yesterday at which Miss Platt Robinson was to make a speech on the modern woman. Miss Platt Robinson didn't turn up. The evidence is that she left her house early the day before yesterday without luggage. She didn't even say when she was coming back. She hasn't been seen since."

"Well, well," said Reggie Fortune. "And what's Lady Bandicot's view?"

"Lady Bandicot points out that never before in our fair island story did Miss Platt Robinson fail to make a speech when she had the chance. She argues that it was no small

thing which stopped her from making a speech. She suggests that Miss Platt Robinson has been made away with by some wicked enemy of the rights of women, or some disgruntled female in her office."

"It is an interesting case, isn't it?" Mr. Fortune smiled. "And what does the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department make of it?"

"I think it's a case for a medical man, Reginald. I suppose the wretched woman is off her head. Lost her memory, or had a nervous breakdown. Didn't she look like it?"

"I wonder. Where did she live, Lomas?"

Miss Platt Robinson had a new house in a garden suburb. In a room where the paint and curtain glared at each other across angular furniture, which insisted that no man had ever thought of making furniture like it before, Reggie and Lomas conferred with a grim housekeeper. Miss Platt Robinson had said nothing when she went out, but that she would not be in to lunch. She went out alone. She had no one call on her that morning. Lady Flora Norton called the day before.

Reggie, who was playing with the things on the writing-table, looked up.

"An old friend?"

Lady Flora worked under Miss Platt Robinson during the War. She was Lady Flora Holmbury then, of course. Miss Platt Robinson certainly had some letters the morning before she went out. She always had many letters. The housekeeper could not say if there were any friends she was likely to visit. She had many friends.

"Yes, yes. We'll find them in the address book here, no doubt," Reggie said. "Thanks very much. We'll ring when we've finished."

The housekeeper started at this abrupt dismissal, and went out reluctantly.

"What have you got, Reginald?" Lomas came to him.

Mr. Fortune took from the pages of the blotting book an envelope addressed in a bold hand to Miss Platt Robinson.

"Good Gad! Another letter!" Lomas drew out a sheet on which was written "You will not be Superintendent long." "That doesn't seem much to run away from. I suppose there was something more."

Reggie was going over the writing-table. "No, nothing more," he said. "Only that and nothing more. A very interestin' case."

"Some of these drawers are locked."

"Yes. Yes. I don't know how far you're going into Miss Platt Robinson's secrets. I want my lunch."

"I want to know how this letter came here. It didn't come by post."

"No, it didn't come by post," Reggie agreed. "Good-bye."

"Confound you, Fortune. This is serious."

"I know. That's why I'm going. I'm going to lunch with the hermit crab. Good-bye."

To his waiting chauffeur, Mr. Fortune said: "Liverpool Street!"

"Won't the car do it, sir?" Sam smiled.

"You're so romantic, Sam. I want a luncheon-car."

In the afternoon sunshine Mr. Fortune arrived upon the sea-front of Walton-on-the-Naze. The summer was still young, the beach not crowded; though the tide was high only a few bathers disturbed the glittering steel sea. Mr. Fortune walked northwards with a roving eye for them and the little groups that took the air on the promenade. But he saw no one who detained him and when he came to the end of the promenade he strode on northward still, by the path at the edge of the tall green corn above the sea. At the point where the coast opens to make the wide inlet of Harford Water he sat down on a stone groyne and contemplated the landscape.

Only a flock of sheep grazing in the salt meadows and the gleam and call of plovers disturbed the solitude. The tide was rising still but almost full and from the groyne to the grass of the low islands the water shone grey.

"Yes. A soothin' harmony," he murmured. "I like these damsels."

And he rose lazily and went on by the path which runs above the shore between hedges of tamarisk. He saw on one of the islands white tents. When he was as near to it as he could get he came out from the tamarisk and stood by the water. From the island girls were bathing. Mr. Fortune lit a cigar and watched them with artistic approval. They had a boat out. They swam to it, dived, dark lithe shapes curving pleasantly in the sunshine with a gleam of white arms and legs. Mr. Fortune approved—and clapped.

The girl who was steering the boat turned. Another girl climbed into the bows and shaded her eyes to look. Mr. Fortune took off his hat. There was conversation on the sea, heads bobbing up and clustering round the boat and gazing at the intrusive man. Then they vanished into the water like seals, the girl at the tiller bent down, the motor began to throb, and the boat made for Mr. Fortune.

Fifty yards from the shore the engine was stopped.

"What's your trouble?" the girl cried, and she let her boat drift in to stare at him.

"I've come to call," said Fortune.

"At home sixth Mondays," said the girl.

"But I'm sure Miss Platt Robinson would like to see me," said Mr. Fortune meekly.

"Poor you!" she smiled. She had a thin, brown face which became pugnacious when she smiled. "Come on, then!"

Mr. Fortune looked with pathos at the yards of water between him and the boat.

"Be a little man!" she exhorted him. "Nana's watching!" but she brought the boat in nearer. "Baby paddle now?"

Reggie Fortune, though plump, has agility. He ran down the bank and jumped, arriving in the bows of the rocking boat on all fours.

"You owl!" said the girl. "You nearly had her over!"

"Then it would have been my duty and my delight to save your life," Reggie smiled.

"Save your grandmother!" said the girl and started her engine.

Mr. Fortune made his way aft to her side. She was clothed in engineer's overalls, from the trousers of which little bare feet came out. She tucked them under her.

"Don't you mind me, Jonah," she said. "You look about for a whale."

The boat made for the island at the rate of ? knots.

"Do you get many whales?" Reggie smiled. "I thought you were catching crabs?"

The girl stared at him. "It's a clever little man, isn't it?" she said.

The island was near. A group of girls, some still in bathing-dresses, some in sweaters and shorts, stood on the beach watching.

"And very picturesque too!" said Mr. Fortune. "But embarrassin', you know. I never had so many ladies take an interest in me all at once."

"Feet cold?" The girl's warlike smile flashed at him. She stopped the engine, and heaved her little anchor over the gunwale. The boat brought up in shallow water.

"Who is your young man, Vi?" a clear voice hailed.

"Little Jonah looking for a whale," the girl said. She was rolling up her trousers. "Come and paddle, ducky. Nana will hold your hand."

Mr. Fortune took off his shoes and socks.

"There's a brave man!" said she, and they splashed together to the beach.

Mr. Fortune, holding his shoes in one hand, took off his hat with the other to a cluster of smiles.

"I hope I don't intrude?" he said, and heard a camera click at him.

"Sir, the pleasure is ours," said somebody who consisted chiefly of a mop of chestnut hair.

Mr. Fortune became confidential. "Would you mind? Do introduce me to the hostess?"

The small person made a curtsy in the grand style, a work of art made piquant by her shorts and her bare knees, and rising from it showed him beneath chestnut

hair a comical little face with no nose to speak of but large and dangerous eyes.

"So charming of you to give us the pleasure," she murmured in a conventional voice. "We were just going to tea." She put her hand in his arm and led him towards the tents.

Mr. Fortune's feet dragged. Mr. Fortune saw the shape of Miss Platt Robinson. Mr. Fortune gasped slightly. Not as once she sat majestic between Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc Miss Platt Robinson walked the island. That plump, important shape was clothed in a sweater and shorts. Mr. Fortune averted his eyes.

So did not she. Her prominent eyes swelled and glared from a red face. "Mr. Fortune!" she cried. "Positively outrageous!"

"Platty!" said the little creature on Mr. Fortune's arm. "Potatoes, Platty!" Two of the girls took Miss Platt Robinson and led her gently but firmly away.

Mr. Fortune was taken to the tents where two oil stoves were roaring beneath kettles and several deck-chairs stood.

"Won't you sit down?" said the little creature in her conventional voice. "Tea, children!"

"May I put on my shoes?" Reggie murmured.

"If you think you'll feel safer," she smiled.

He subsided on to the grass. He put on his shoes, he gazed at Miss Platt Robinson, who also sat on the ground but afar off with a pail between her legs, scraping a potato in a slow time—a tragic woman.

"She gave a lot of trouble!" the little creature smiled. "But I think she's beginning to grasp things."

"What things?" said Mr. Fortune anxiously.

"The great realities. If you don't work, you don't eat. Platty has to scrape the potatoes for dinner before she has her tea."

Mr. Fortune gazed at her in alarm. But a girl brought him a cup and buttered biscuits. He found himself the centre of a ring of curious and amused girls.

"Do you know all my young people?" said the little creature in her conventional voice. "Vi, Hoodlums, the

Wogger, Belinda"—she reeled off a string of names and nicknames, and laughed. "And you're Daniel in the lions' den, aren't you? What's your second name, Daniel?"

"I am called Fortune," said Reggie meekly.

"The Scotland Yard man?" she cried. "Oh, good work!"

"Yes. Yes, I am rather proud of it myself," Reggie murmured.

There were emotions among the sweaters. Someone pointed a finger at the slim, dark girl of the boat. "You've done it now, Vi. This is your fatal weakness for policemen."

"He's better here than spying on land," Vi smiled at him. "It's a long, long way to Tipperary, isn't it, Mr. Policeman?" She waved her hand to the surrounding sea.

"Yes, he's better here," the little person pronounced. "But how in the name of wonder did he get here? Prisoner, what brought you to the premises?"

"May I smoke?" Reggie smiled and lit a cigar. "Thanks. Well, the reasons were primarily geological."

"If there's any leg-pulling we'll do it, thank you."

"I wouldn't dream of it." Reggie swept a deprecating glance round the circle of Amazons. "It's unnecessary. The reasons were primarily geological; secondarily, gastronomic or culinary. Somebody sent a hermit crab to Miss Platt Robinson——"

"Oh, help! Platty didn't eat him, did she?" the little person gurgled.

"Is a hermit crab a crime, constable?" said Vi.

"The answer to both questions is in the negative," said Mr. Fortune gravely. "A hermit crab isn't even a clue. He might have come from anywhere round England. But his packing was very interesting; seaweed with some little lumps of sand caught in it, hard red lumps with lighter veins partly shell," he smiled at the small creature. "That gave me the hermit crab's address, you see, Miss—I'm sorry I didn't catch your name?"

"Couldn't you guess that from the seaweed?" said the little creature. "Bad luck! But you were quite clever, weren't you? What did you find in the sand?"

Mr. Fortune shook his head at her.

"No, not clever, only painstaking. All for your good. I found bits of *trophon contrarius*."

"Is it catching?"

"No. It's a shellfish of the past. Of the pliocene, in fact, some time before you were born. It indicated that the sand was Red Crag. Red Crag only comes down to the sea between Felixstowe and Frinton. We come next to the gastronomic evidence provided by the tin. That tin had held pigeon pie. There were still fragments adhering. Well, one doesn't buy pigeon pie in tins for ordinary household purposes. So it emerged that somebody who was living in a boat or in camp on this bit of coast took a friendly interest in Miss Platt Robinson. I sent a man down to look for ladies living the simple life near Walton. He discovered your island. So when Miss Platt Robinson vanished I came to call." He smiled. "That's my half of the story. I should like to hear yours, Miss—— It really would be friendly to tell me your name."

The little person looked at him profoundly. She had greenish eyes flecked with brown. Curious eyes which laughed in their solemnity. She said nothing.

It was Vi who spoke with that pugnacious smile of hers. "Does your mother know you're out, Mr. Fortune?"

"You alarm me, madame!"

"That was the idea. You might be here a long time. Quite a long time. You might be peeling potatoes same as Platty. You might be helping her wash-up. Platty would like to have somebody else wash-up. Specially the bacon plates. We'd lend you some clothes, too. You'd look like a boy scout."

Mr. Fortune sighed. "You don't do me justice, you know. I am really kind at heart. I don't want you to get into serious trouble."

"I should worry!" Vi laughed. "Well, Snooky, what about him? He wants chastening."

"Don't be an owl," said the little person. "Mr. Fortune, you mean if we don't let you go off with Platty there'll be policemen coming to the island?"

"It is only too likely, Miss——"

"Well, what of it? You came here of your own choice. So did Platty. She stood there on the groyne looking like a pelican in the wilderness. Of course, we sent the boat across. When she was getting in she fell into the sea. So we lent her clothes while her own were drying. Then she wouldn't do her share of the washing-up. So Platty was made kitchen orderly. No work, no meals, for Platty. We're nice girls who rescue the perishin'. We're good girls who're findin' work for a forlorn female. Helpin' the unemployed. We're not afraid of your policemen, Mr. Fortune."

"You don't begin at the beginning, do you?" Reggie smiled. "What brought Miss Platt Robinson down to Walton Point, Lady Flora?"

"You pig!" the little person cried. "You knew me all the time!"

"You see, that's my job, to know all the time," Reggie said meekly. "But I don't. I don't know what Miss Platt Robinson will be up to when she gets back to land. There's threatening letters. There's assault. There's kidnapping."

"There isn't!" Lady Flora was shrill. "She came of her own silly, nasty mind."

"Oh, cut it out!" Vi said. "Let's maroon 'em together, Snooky!"

Lady Flora's green eyes gleamed gold. "That's a solution!"

"Not to-night," said Reggie, looking at the sea. The tide was far out. The island was surrounded by wide banks of muddy sand on which the boat lay high and dry. "Lot's of time to talk it over, Lady Flora. Do tell me how you brought her down here?"

Lady Flora considered him again.

She looked round at her cohort of girls. "Is he human? Who thinks he's human?"

A number of hands went up.

"Who thinks he's a pig?"

Vi voted for that with a frown.

"Mr. Fortune is human. Sir, listen to the story of our

young lives. In the War we were all good little girls making shells. Some fiend sent Platty down as a welfare-worker to our factory. Before we knew where we were, our superintendent was booted out and Platty had her job. That's Platty's little way. She's the World's Worst Wangler. And then she made us all happy. Platty's great on discipline. Platty's idea of discipline is makin' a girl do everything she don't want the way she hates to do it. She altered all our shifts. She upset all our days off. She turned down half the forewomen and put in a mob of her own. We used to call 'em Platty's Spy Corps. Oh, it was a merry old time. We should have had our own private revolution if the Germans hadn't started theirs first. The Armistice shut the factory down just in time to save Platty's neck. Well, we burnt Platty in effigy on Armistice night and resumed the life of peace. But we didn't forget her. And when we heard she'd wangled another big job, it was felt something had to be done about it. We remonstrated with her by hermit crabs, and so forth. But Platty went on her wicked way. We heard she was disciplining the poor girls in the Records Department same like she disciplined us. Then we took action. I called on Platty. She's always been a little afraid of me——"

"I don't wonder," Reggie murmured.

"Poor me!" said Lady Flora. "No, sir; it's the title that does it. Platty's a snob. Well, I called. I was friendly but patronizin'. I congratulated her on her appointment. I hoped—kind but cold—I hoped she'd make good. I understood the girls in the Records Department were a wild and wanton crowd. Platty said it was too true, but she was introducin' discipline. I hoped so, superior and incredulous. I had heard there was a party of them down here in camp shockin' the whole East Coast by their costume and conduct. Platty jumped at it. Where were they; who were they; what were they up to? So I gave her the address. And the next time I saw our Platty she was standin' there on the Point gogglin' at us. Wasn't she askin' for it, Mr. Fortune? We brought her over and we gave her discipline. If she isn't a brighter and a better

woman, it's not our fault. We've been quite firm with the Platter. She's had to do lots of things she didn't want the way she hates to do them. Look at her now."

Miss Platt Robinson stood glowering at a fire which smoked sullenly beneath a black cauldron.

"Platty's evening hate. She cannot make a fire burn. And if it won't burn, Platty has to wash-up in cold water. So good for Platty. The pains we take with her, Mr. Fortune!"

"Yes—yes," said Reggie dreamily. "Fellows who write plays tell me it's the last act that's the trouble. How's it going to end, Lady Flora? I don't see how it can end happily."

"Dear me, Mr. Fortune"—the little creature resumed her conventional voice—"I thought you had come here to clear it all up. That's what policemen are for, isn't it?"

"Policemen are human, you know. They feel for Miss Platt Robinson. She's a woman and a sister. And sisters can be very unpleasant sometimes. Haven't you noticed it?"

"You don't think she's grateful, Mr. Fortune?" said the little creature sadly.

"Speakin' from observation, I fear she isn't grateful. Speakin' from experience, I'm sure she has no sense of humour. And speakin' for myself, I'm frightened. What did you think of doing with her?"

"We thought a week's education would be enough," Mr. Fortune."

"You'll have police here before that. You'll be in a police-court for threatening letters, assault, and anything else Miss Platt Robinson's lawyers can think of."

"Then it would all come out!" the green eyes laughed. "How gorgeous! But she'd never risk it, Mr. Fortune. Think of Platty's prestige. Think of the girls in the Records Department chortling."

"She'd risk it all right," said Reggie sadly. "Aren't you a little hard on Miss Platt Robinson? You might give her a chance. You'll have to let her go soon. Why

not do it prettily? Let her go now if she'll kiss and be friends."

"Mr. Fortune, you're a wangler yourself!" the little creature cried.

"She shan't kiss me," someone said fervently. It seemed to be the general feeling.

"No doubt that can be arranged." Mr. Fortune smiled upon them.

"All right. It's got to end some time," Lady Flora said. "Shall he wangle?"

Hands went up.

"Shall he not wangle?"

Only the black-browed Vi opposed.

"Go and wangle, sir. First prize for courage—R. Fortune."

Miss Platt Robinson, surrounded by wood smoke, had a rather ghostly appearance.

"This is a distressin' situation, madame," said Reggie.

She struggled with passions. "What are you doing here?" she exploded.

"I'm trying to get you away. But your friends seem to be very determined young people."

"My friends!" Miss Platt Robinson gasped. "Don't you understand that this is an abominable outrage? Look at me!"

"I do—I do," said Reggie; and looked away. "Oh, Miss Platt Robinson, why did you come here?"

"I was kidnapped, sir."

"But you came alone. We found that out. All the way from London to Walton Point. And these damsels say you asked them to ferry you over."

"It's a conspiracy, Mr. Fortune," said Miss Platt Robinson vehemently. "These wretched girls wanted to get me in their power. That creature, Lady Flora, told me there was a party of my girls from the Records Department out here behaving scandalously. I considered it my duty to investigate. And look how they treated me!"

"Do you really want people to look at you?" Reggie said with emotion. "I mean to say, we can bring some

police over here and rescue you. But do you want policemen assistin' you in this—er—*négligé?*"

"It's perfectly disgraceful!" Miss Platt Robinson faltered.

"I'm only thinkin' of you," Reggie murmured. "You see, these young women say they didn't ask you to come, and they won't help you to go, and while you stay you'll have to work for your living."

"But that's outrageous!" Miss Platt Robinson whimpered.

"But the only answer is policemen—and you're in a sweater and shorts!"

"I don't know what they've done with my clothes. They've no right to keep my clothes. It's—why it's theft, at least. I can prosecute them all. Theft and kidnapping and conspiracy. Oh, they'll be sorry for this!"

"I shouldn't count on it!" Reggie shook his head. "Are you quite sure you want to prosecute, Miss Platt Robinson? If you take 'em into court they'll bring out the whole story. I'm only thinking of you. Do you want to be cross-examined about your camp life? Very sad reading for your girls in the Records Department. And, speakin' officially, I doubt if you'll get a conviction. They'll say you would come where you weren't wanted, and they fished you out of the sea and gave you dry clothes and——"

"But they won't let me go!" Miss Platt Robinson wailed. "Oh, Mr. Fortune, you must do something!"

"It is a distressing situation," Reggie agreed. "They're not fond of you, you know. They seem to think you haven't been nice to them. Why not try it? Bury the past. You want to get away. You don't want scandal. Well, kiss and be friends. Tell 'em if they put you ashore in your own clothes next tide you won't prosecute."

Miss Platt Robinson stared at him. "But I told them that yesterday!" she cried. "They only laughed at me!"

"Is it possible they didn't trust you?" Reggie sighed. "This is very painful. I wonder if they'll trust me?"

"Do try, Mr. Fortune!"

"Freedom and your own skirt, and no prosecution?" Reggie held out his hand. "Promise?"

"Of course!" Miss Platt Robinson took his hand gingerly.

Reggie strolled back to the circle of girls by the tents. "Peace with honour. You put her ashore in the morning clothed and in her right mind. She don't prosecute."

"Good for Platty!" said Lady Flora. "No more washing-up for Platty! Reveal Platty's clothes, Vi. She'll want to dress for dinner."

She did, but she was not sociable. Except towards the lemon cheese-cakes, her manner was restrained. She retired early, desiring to be put ashore as soon as possible in the morning. The flap of a tent fell behind her.

"Well done, Platty!" said Lady Flora. "Didn't she behave prettily? Not one rude word! Quite a reformed character. I thought we could educate her. Those women in her department won't know their Platty." She sighed. "What have I done for thee, England, my England?" The last of the sunset lingered rosy, the moon was rising out of a gleam of silver on the sea, and from the mainland came faintly the bleating of sheep. "All is peace and I feel so good. It's quite disconcertin', Mr. Fortune."

"Yes. I shouldn't let that worry you," said Reggie.

Between a ground-sheet and a rug he dozed uneasily through that night. Stiff, crumpled, and unshorn in a blaze of morning sunshine, he was landed beside Miss Platt Robinson on Walton Point. She was primly neat. He had never disliked her so much. From the island came three joyful cheers.

"Really!" Miss Platt Robinson muttered, and set her lips.

"I quite agree with you," said Reggie heartily.

But she had no more to say, and she strode out at a round pace. When they came to the town: "I was thinking of a bath and some breakfast," he ventured.

"I am taking the first train to London," said she.

Reggie sighed relief and turned into a barber's.

The next morning, among his letters, he found one from Lady Flora.

"Dear Mr. Fortune,—Perhaps it would be good for you to have these. With our love." These were photographs, chiefly of Miss Platt Robinson. Miss Platt Robinson was shown in sweater and shorts blowing the fire, scraping the potatoes, washing the dishes. But what Mr. Fortune stared at was the postscript, for Lady Flora had written: "Wouldn't they look nice in the picture papers?"

Mrs. Fortune was allured by his expression. "Reggie, have you told me all?" said she tragically, and she came to look. "Oh, bless her! My dear, they ought to have taken her for the movies!"

"I shouldn't wonder if they did," said Reggie morosely.

"But what is this? She found a photograph of Reggie walking barefoot, with his shoes in his hand, and bowing. "Oh, you precious! I want this enlarged!"

"You have no heart, Joan!" Reggie complained. "No woman has any heart!"

Mrs. Fortune gurgled. She had found another photograph of him putting on his shoes, while a circle of girls admired him. "But it's a Mormon," said she. "A nice, shy Mormon!"

At this point a maid came in to say that Mr. Lomas had rung up to ask Mr. Fortune to go to Scotland Yard at once.

Lomas received him severely. "You wired me that the Platt Robinson was returning safe and in good condition."

"Oh my aunt!" Reggie gasped. "Didn't she?"

"I don't know whether you're mad or she is. As far as I can make out you've been compounding felony and committing high treason and being no gentleman. Look at that."

It was a letter of many sheets, a formal complaint from Miss Platt Robinson to the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department that she had been kidnapped and kept in captivity by a party of women acting in collusion with one of his officials, Mr. Reginald Fortune. She proposed to call on Mr. Lomas and lay the facts be-

fore him. She expected him to take drastic action on her behalf.

"She's not a nice woman, Lomas," said Reggie sadly, "not really a nice woman."

"Good Gad, don't be futile. The woman's capable of dragging the department into a big scandal. What are the facts?"

So Reggie told him. Reggie showed him the photographs.

He was profoundly moved. "Poor wretch, I don't wonder she's peevish."

"No. I thought she was peevish. Do you wonder I told her to hush it up?"

"It's the only thing to do, of course. She'd ruin her position if she drags all this out. Good Gad! Think of these snapshots in the picture papers."

"I do," said Reggie. "I'm in one or two. Lady Flora's very resourceful."

"Oh, the Platt Robinson must let it drop. I'll manage her."

"I wonder," Reggie sighed.

"I can frighten her," said Lomas.

And Miss Platt Robinson came. Lomas put up his eyeglass, Lomas glared at her, Lomas rang for a shorthand writer. "Sit down, madame. You have made a grave charge against a trusted adviser of mine. Mr. Fortune will be present at this interview. I am having a note taken of all that you say. Let me warn you that I am acquainted with all the facts and approve of Mr. Fortune's action throughout. It is entirely owing to his skill and resource that you have been saved from a distressing situation to which you had come by your own folly. You are now breaking a promise which you made in your own interests. You are bringing a false charge against him. I warn you that anything you say without foundation will involve you in very serious consequences."

Miss Platt Robinson flinched. She did not expect to be treated like this. She had been outrageously treated. She wanted those women punished.

"You undertook not to prosecute them in order to prevent the practical joke which they had played on you being made public. Mr. Fortune gave you good advice. You want to break that undertaking. Do you want to see these photographs in the picture papers?" He handed them across the table.

"Oh! Abominable!" Miss Platt Robinson cried, and crushed them into a ball.

"They have the negatives, you know. Do you want to make it public you roused such ill-feeling in the department you last controlled that the women determined to punish you like this?"

"What am I to do? Is nothing to be done for me?"

"We have done a great deal for you. We have extricated you from a most unpleasant situation without scandal. It is more than your conduct gave you a right to expect. I have done with the case."

"No one is to be punished?" Miss Platt Robinson gasped. "What about all those threatening letters I had?"

"Threats? I have read no threats."

"Insulting!"

"Have you any proof who wrote them? We have none."

"You don't want proof!" Miss Platt Robinson cried.

"Good morning, madame," said Lomas: and when she had gone he smiled on Reggie.

"I wonder," Reggie murmured. "You know, I should put a man to watch her, Lomas. I don't think she's safe."

"Good Gad!" Lomas dropped his eyeglass and his smile. "What can she do? Assassinate Lady Flora? Or do you think Lady Flora's rascals will be after her again?"

"Some nice quiet man," Reggie murmured. "She's not safe alone."

It was a month afterwards that Mr. Fortune, visiting Lomas on the matter of the infested marmoset (a crime, you remember, of passion), was shown the report of the detectives who had been observing Miss Platt Robinson. No one had attempted to interfere with the lady. She had gone nowhere except to a few public meetings, and several

times on a jaunt by 'bus in the evening from her suburb to Finsbury Park.

"Not worth while keeping the men on the job, is it?" Lomas shrugged. "Evidently Lady Flora's finished with her, and she's not meddling with Lady Flora."

"But why Finsbury Park?" said Reggie. "Lot's of nice places nearer home. What does she do at Finsbury Park? I could bear to know that, Lomas."

"My dear fellow, lots of simple people like a 'bus ride on a summer evening."

"She's not simple," Reggie protested. "Not at all a nice woman, Lomas. Tell your fellows to find out what she does at Finsbury Park."

"Oh, very well," Lomas shrugged. "You've got Miss Platt Robinson on your nerves, Reginald."

"I have, I have."

Two weeks later there came to Lomas a letter from the Minister of Social Welfare. Mr. Weeley regretted to find that the Criminal Investigation Department had failed to discover the author of the threatening letters received by Miss Platt Robinson. Emboldened, he was compelled to assume, by this strange inertia of the police, this person had now sent letters of a more scandalous character. Very fortunately, however, impunity had made the author rash. If Mr. Lomas would kindly call upon him, he would be able to point out evidence which must lead to drastic action.

"Yes. I shouldn't wonder if he's right," Mr. Fortune smiled.

"You know this woman's a public nuisance," Lomas groaned. "Who's after her now?"

"Have you got that letter we found in her blotting-book?"

"Of course I have. All the Platt Robinson communications—except the hermit crab. You had that."

"He wouldn't keep. But the letter will."

"We never found out how it came to her, you know. It wasn't posted."

"No. It wasn't posted," Reggie smiled. "That's what's

interesting. Lomas, my dear old thing, what about Finsbury Park? What did Miss Platt Robinson do at Finsbury Park?"

Lomas rang for the reports. They testified that on three nights during the past fortnight Miss Platt Robinson had posted a letter, once certainly a blue letter, in a certain pillar-box at Finsbury Park. "Very sound man, that man," Reggie murmured, and turned the pages of the London Directory. "Pillar-box at the corner of Curtis Road and Garden Road. Garden Road . . . yes. Lomas, dear, ring up Mr. Weeley and tell him we'll come round to him now if he'll have Miss Platt Robinson and her letters ready for us."

"I don't see my way," Lomas protested.

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow!" Reggie chuckled. "Then leave it to me."

They found Mr. Weeley frowning majestically, guarded by a cynical secretary who did not conceal his disgust for the whole affair. Over against him Miss Platt Robinson swelled and preened herself. Mr. Weeley spoke. He had to complain of the manner in which the Criminal Investigation Department had handled this serious case. He was bound to say—he desired to point out—he must add—and he had only to remark in conclusion. It was deplorable that inertia—he did not wish to use the word incompetence—should expose a valued public servant to such persecution.

"Yes. It will save time if we come to the facts, sir," Reggie said. "I understand Miss Platt Robinson has received some fresh letters! Where are they?"

Mr. Weeley again delivered an oration. The secretary handed Reggie six letters. They were on pale blue rough paper. They were in a bold hand. Their tone was alike. The last said: "Do not imagine you will be allowed to stay here. We shall get you out somehow. No outsiders here. The Civil Service does not want them. I have had more than enough of your meddling. I have friends and influence behind me. You will not be superintendent long."

Reggie read it aloud. "Very painful. The work of a spite-

ful and cunning mind," he said gravely. "And Miss Platt Robinson has evidence who was the writer."

"Look at the postmark, please." Miss Platt Robinson smiled.

"Posted—last Friday—N.4. The others the same."

"N.4 is Finsbury Park," said Miss Platt Robinson. "Perhaps Mr. Fortune will compare the writing with this." She handed him an official document signed E. Thornton.

"Surely I have seen this writing before?" Reggie frowned.

"Do you know her?" Miss Platt Robinson cried.

"I have only met her in your room, madame. When we were investigating the earlier letters you gave me a document written by your assistant-superintendent. You suspected her then."

"I have always suspected her," Miss Platt Robinson cried. "Don't you see the likeness?"

"It leaps to the eye," said Mr. Weeley. "Yes, positively I am compelled to say. It leaps to the eye."

"And Miss Thornton lives at Finsbury Park," Miss Platt Robinson cried in triumph. "23 Garden Road, Finsbury Park. That is the paper she uses. Look, here is a note of hers. She writes with a J nib."

"You've prepared the evidence very carefully, madame." Reggie said.

"The writing is surely conclusive," Mr. Weeley pronounced.

"Yes. The writing is like Miss Thornton's writing," Reggie said. "But it's even more like this." He produced the letter found in Miss Platt Robinson's blotting book and read it out: "'You will not be superintendent long.' Just compare that, sir."

Miss Platt Robinson became red. "Where did you get that?" she gasped.

"You see the resemblance, Mr. Weeley. Six weeks ago, when Miss Platt Robinson's sudden absence from London alarmed some of her friends, they called us in. Lomas and I went to her house to make inquiries. We found this letter on her writing table. We found some of this blue

paper. We found one of her pens fitted with a J nib. The letter has not been posted, you see. It is obvious that it was an experiment in imitating Miss Thornton's writing. The first of the series. The others were posted by Miss Platt Robinson herself. In the last few weeks she has often been to Finsbury Park of nights. Fortunately she was attended by a detective. He has seen her post four letters in the pillar-box near Miss Thornton's house at the corner of Garden Road. Last Friday he saw that the letter was blue. Miss Platt Robinson has been writing herself these letters in order to bring a false charge against her assistant-superintendent. I don't know whether you wish the case to go to the Public Prosecutor or whether you will deal with it yourself."

"Obviously a case for the Public Prosecutor," said Lomas.

"Good heavens, woman, what have you done?" Mr. Weeley cried.

"It's a conspiracy, Mr. Weeley," Miss Platt Robinson wailed. "They've been working against me all through. They had no business in my house! Setting detectives to watch me. Outrageous!"

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Weeley. "Outrageous, indeed. Is that all you have to say? Don't you see what you've done? You've involved the office in a scandal, a gross scandal, madame. It's intolerable. A most painful thing. You've betrayed my confidence in you in the most deplorable way. Really—oh, you must go."

"Not back to the department, Miss Platt Robinson," said the secretary.

"Not——? Oh, Mr. Weeley, you don't mean that?"

"Great heavens, woman, you don't think you can retain your position after this?"

Miss Platt Robinson's eyes swelled at him. The words which came to Miss Platt Robinson were: "Outrageous! Really outrageous!" She rose. She made strange noises. "It's a conspiracy against me," she announced. "You've all agreed to trump this up. I won't bear it. I'd rather resign." The door slammed behind her.

"Not really a nice woman," Reggie murmured.

"Yes, yes—I mean no, of course," Mr. Weeley bleated. "A most painful affair. At the same time I am bound to point out, Lomas—I do hope you agree with me—no reason why it should go any further."

"Now she's gone I dare say Miss Thornton won't want to prosecute her," Lomas shrugged.

"Mis Thornton's a very good official," said the secretary.

"Yes, quite so, quite so. It is a mistaken policy to appoint these outsiders. I always thought so," said Mr. Weeley.

Outside in the corridor: "But I wish we could have sacked him too," said Reggie sadly.

"You never will," Lomas sighed. "Not while England's England. Even you have your limitations, Reginald. That comforts me. For I find you rather diabolical."

"No. No. Only careful," said Mr. Fortune.

RICHARD CONNELL

THE STING OF THE WASP

THAT night Matthew Kelton was working over a new puzzle, a cryptogram—a most difficult one. He had given himself till five in the morning to solve it. Then he would brew himself a cup of tea and go to bed. There was a smile on his face, which was rather like a ripe crabapple. He was getting the key to the cipher. But then, he usually did.

Matthew Kelton had one passion—puzzles. Having had the forethought to make a neat fortune for himself by inventing some new chemicals, he was able, in middle age, to retire and devote his life to his favorite pastime. Any sort of riddle held a fascination for him; but what interested him most was the deepest, strangest riddle of all—the riddle of human behavior.

The clock in the corner of his prim old-fashioned study struck midnight. He bent his white head over the maze of symbols and hieroglyphics which made up the cryptogram. Then his telephone rang. With a certain mild impatience he went to answer it.

"This is Evan Turner," said the voice at the other end of the wire.

"Hello, Evan. Something wrong? Your voice is tense."

"Can you come to the house of Guy Oakley—that big, ugly place on Dark River Road—at once?"

"I'm rather busy. What for?"

"Because," said Turner, "they've just found the body of Lewis Cope there—and he's been murdered—shot."

"Any idea who did it?"

The man at the other end of the wire hesitated. Before

(Copyright, 1928, by The Crowell Publishing Company, New York.)

Turner could answer, Matthew Kelton said, "They're accusing Guy Oakley. Isn't that the situation?"

"Yes."

"Does he admit it?"

"No."

"Has he an alibi?"

Again Turner hesitated. "No. Not a conclusive one, anyhow."

"Doesn't sound like Oakley," said Matthew Kelton. "Still, you never can tell. Repressed men explode sometimes. Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Drive over here immediately."

"But why, Evan? I'm deep in a real puzzle. I see no puzzle in the killing of Cope. The bitter hate of Oakley for Cope, and Cope for Oakley, has become a classic, like the friendship of Damon and Pythias. When two strong men hate like that, something is bound to happen. Apparently, now it has."

"My duty is to do everything I possibly can to save Guy Oakley," said Turner. "That's why I'm turning to you. You might see something the police would miss. You'd be doing me a great favor, Matthew, to come over."

"Simple, vulgar murder fails to interest me much. It's worse than stupid—it's in bad taste," said Matthew Kelton. He thought a moment. "You say that Guy Oakley has no real alibi?"

"I'll be frank with you, Matthew. He hasn't. A jury would laugh at his story, and hang him without leaving the box."

"H-mm. Now *that* is interesting. In fact, I scent the elements of a puzzle. I'll be right over!"

The residence of Guy Oakley, the banker, was a vast and gloomy mid-Victorian house, on the edge of an extensive pine wood.

Matthew Kelton was shown into a large somber drawing-room, full of black walnut furniture. A group of men had gathered there—Oakley, Evan Turner, Police Captain Lamotte, Doctor Ussher. They bowed toward Matthew Kelton as he came in.

"Evening, Mr. Kelton," the police captain said. "A bad business, I'm afraid."

"Crime always is, Captain. Well?"

"Come into the library with me, Matthew. I'll give you the facts," Evan Turner said.

Matthew Kelton followed the lawyer into an austere, book-lined room.

"Oakley is my client," said the lawyer. "I don't dodge the fact that the evidence is dead against him. He hated Cope, and Cope hated him. It's an old story, and not a pretty one."

"A woman?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Cope?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"They were sworn enemies. Their hatred was almost a religion with them. I'm not going to keep any important fact from you, Matthew."

"Quite right."

"Only a week ago I had dinner with Guy Oakley in this very house. I've been his attorney for years, but I've never been a close friend. I doubt if he has any."

"Strong, silent men are apt not to."

"Well, the cocktails warmed up Oakley, made him communicative—for him. We were talking along about nothing in particular, when suddenly he burst out, 'That cur, Cope! I saw him to-day, looking at me with those evil green eyes of his. I'll never be happy—or safe—while he's in the world. I'd kill him like a rat if I thought I could get away with it!'

"I told Oakley he was a fool to talk like that—to me, or anybody. He calmed down, and said he didn't mean it. But he did, Matthew."

"No doubt. Well, what then?"

"Here is what happened to-night: Oakley had dinner alone. He drank too much—four stiff cocktails, a half-bottle of sauterne, and a high-ball. So Reeves, his butler, testified. Liquor, as I know, always made him sullen, even

savage. He was in a decidedly bad humor. Reeves says, when he went into his library immediately after dinner.

"At half past nine, Lewis Cope came to the house. He was in dinner clothes, and he seemed to be in a high state of excitement, Reeves, who let him in, says. He pushed past Reeves, and went into the library. Reeves heard the sound of angry voices, as if Oakley and Cope were having a violent row. Reeves went down in the cellar to look at the furnace fire, and was there possibly eight or nine minutes.

"When he came up-stairs, no sounds could be heard in the library. Somewhat alarmed, Reeves tapped at the door and, getting no answer, went in. Oakley was sprawling in a chair, apparently in a drunken stupor, for there was a half-bottle of rye and a glass on the table. Cope had gone. Reeves helped Oakley up-stairs, and put him to bed. It seems that Reeves was rather used to that sort of thing."

"Solitary drinker, eh?"

"Yes."

"Bad," said Matthew Kelton. "Bad."

"At twenty minutes past eleven," continued Turner, "Oakley's chauffeur and his wife, and the gardener and *his* wife returned from town in the station wagon. They'd been in to see a movie. As they came up the main drive the car's head-lights picked up something white, lying by the roadside on the lawn, about twenty-five yards from the house. It was Cope's shirt front. He had been shot through the heart. Slight powder marks were on the shirt, as if he had been shot from a distance of two or three feet.

"Without stopping to make any sort of examination, the chauffeur and the others drove down Dark River Road about a quarter of a mile, to where a state trooper is stationed, regulating traffic. Sergeant Lester, a keen young officer, came back with them, and with his flashlight made a thorough examination of the body and the ground around it. He found no weapon. He 'phoned for Captain Lamotte, who arrived shortly with Police Surgeon Ussher.

Doctor Ussher said Cope had been dead about an hour. They went into the house, and woke up Oakley. He appeared to be groggy from the drink, but the shock of seeing Cope's body sobered him completely. He kept a tight grip on himself, however. Said nothing. Merely stared at Cope.

"Captain Lamotte, who was watching him closely, says that he read in Oakley's face a fierce hate for Cope, even in death. Captain Lamotte is a man of action. He said to Oakley, 'Did you do this?' . . . 'I didn't,' said Oakley. 'I wish I had!'

"I arrived just then and shut up Oakley. Also, I persuaded Captain Lamotte not to arrest him formally until you had a chance to look things over. Bankers can't afford to be arrested, even if they are entirely innocent."

"And it's even worse if they're guilty, I suppose," said Matthew Kelton. "Evan, I don't see much hope for Oakley. I dare say Lewis Cope was no ornament to society—a vicious, ill-matured fellow, I've always heard. Even so, it was mad of Oakley to kill him, especially like this."

"Drink-crazed," muttered Turner, more to himself than to Matthew Kelton.

"Beginning to work out your line of defense, eh?"

"Looks as if I'll need to."

"What about self-defense?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"Not much chance. There was no sign of a struggle, as Sergeant Lester will testify. Oakley denies emphatically that he had any sort of physical fight with Cope."

"Suppose you ask Mr. Oakley to step in here a moment. I'm not the sort of man who can tell a guilty person from an innocent one by feeling his pulse, but I'd like to ask a few questions."

The lawyer went into the other room and returned with Guy Oakley. The banker was a big man, fifty, perhaps, with the lined and seamed face of a man who has known much worry and sorrow in his life.

"Have a cigar, Mr. Oakley," Matthew Kelton greeted him. "I have these made in Havana." He offered Oakley

his case. The banker took a long cigar, lit it. His fingers, Kelton noted, were steady.

"Now, Mr. Oakley, please tell me, briefly, what happened to-night," Matthew Kelton said, as casually as if he were asking for a description of a card game.

"I didn't kill Cope," said Oakley. He sank into a chair, as if he were very tired.

"That's what Turner and I will have to prove," said Matthew Kelton. "Help us by telling us exactly what occurred."

"I've been on the ragged edge, lately," the banker said. "Nerves all jangled. Business worries—and Cope. I think he hated me on sight. I know I took a strong dislike to him when I first met him, some seven years ago. That happens sometimes, you know.

"Then—four years ago—we got into that mess. We both behaved pretty badly, I guess. It was a nasty snarl of treachery, deceit, lies all 'round. It's all over now. She—she's dead. But our hate lived. Cope I knew to be vindictive—and subtle. I've seen him watching me with the eyes of a snake, waiting to strike. I waited. It was harrowing."

"Naturally," said Matthew Kelton. "Then?"

"To-night I drank too much at dinner. I've been doing that lately. An escape, you see. Afterward, I went into my library, with a bottle of rye. Frankly, my idea was to drink myself unconscious. I was well on the way when suddenly Cope came into the room. I thought at first it was some ghastly vision my disordered senses had conjured up.

"Then Cope began to talk. 'You're afraid of me, Oakley,' he said. 'You have reason to be.' I thought he had come to kill me."

"Were you armed?" Matthew Kelton asked.

"No."

"You own a gun, though. Where was it?"

"I have several. Two. One was in a drawer in the dresser of my bedroom." The banker hesitated.

"And the other?"

"In the pocket of the suit I took off when I dressed for dinner."

"I see. Go on."

"Cope stood there looking at me. His face was the face of a crazy man. He smiled, a terrible smile. Then, very quietly he said, 'I've good news for you, Oakley. A doctor examined me to-day. You'll be delighted to know that my lungs are bad. I'll be lucky to live out the year. I hope we'll meet in torment.'

"He stood there looking at me with his green eyes. I burst out, 'Get out of here!' He dropped his quiet manner. 'Why don't you kill me!' he shouted. 'I will,' I said, and started to struggle to my feet. Because of the drink my body was not under good control. To my astonishment he did not attack me. Instead he backed away, smiling that terrible smile.

"'Not to-night,' he said, and laughed. I'll hear that laugh in my dreams. 'No,' he said, like a man talking to himself, 'I'll not kill you to-night. And you can't kill me, Oakley, because I've been dead for years.

"'But some day I will kill you, Oakley. You can look forward to that. Yours will not be a pleasant death. Good night!'

"He turned and went quickly out of the room. I stood there a moment or so, dazed. Then I downed a whole glass of rye, and sank down on a chair, pretty thoroughly knocked out. The next thing I knew Reeves was putting me to bed. That is the absolute truth!"

"You heard no shot?"

"No."

"You did not follow Cope out of the house?"

"No."

"Mr. Oakley," said Matthew Kelton, unexpectedly, "why do you wear only one stud in your evening shirt?"

The banker glanced down at his shirt front. It had two buttonholes. The top one held a black pearl stud, set in platinum. The bottom hole was empty.

"Couldn't find the other one," the banker said. "Maybe the burglars took it."

"What burglars?"

"My house was burglarized a couple of months ago, while I was away. They made off with some plate and jewelry. Nothing very valuable."

"That's all for the present, Mr. Oakley," said Matthew Kelton. The banker joined the others in the drawing-room.

Matthew Kelton gravely puffed at his cigar.

"I don't envy you your job, Evan," he said. "I've seldom listened to a clumsier and less plausible story."

"It might be true."

"That's what you'll have to convince a hard-headed jury. But, Evan, bear this in mind: there are times when nothing is more unbelievable than the truth. I'd like to see Cope's body."

Matthew Kelton, together with Turner, Captain Lamotte, Doctor Ussher and Oakley, went out to the spot where Cope's body, covered with a blanket, lay, awaiting the arrival of the coroner. Sergeant Lester was on guard.

With a powerful electric torch, Matthew Kelton made a brief examination of the body.

"Found anything new, Sergeant?" he asked.

"I've got the bullet, Mr. Kelton. Dug it out of the ground. It went clean through him."

"Let me see it, please."

The sergeant dropped a small lead pellet into Matthew Kelton's palm. Kelton examined it closely.

"What do you make of it, Captain?"

"I know a bit about guns. Hobby of mine," the police captain said. "But this bullet is something unusual. Steel nose. Very long. Like a small nail, almost. Two big for a .22 caliber. Too small for a .32. I can't tell what sort of gun fired it. I'd say, though, that it was fired at close range and by a steady hand."

"Obviously," said Matthew Kelton, studying the bullet. "Guns are a hobby of mine too, Captain. Now, it's my opinion—an opinion merely, you understand—that this bullet was fired from a Skomak pistol."

"Never heard of one," said the police captain.

"Not many people in America have," said Matthew Kelton, looking, not at the captain, but at Guy Oakley. "And that's fortunate too. I doubt if there are a dozen weapons of this particular sort in the entire country. They are the invention of a German and are, or rather were, made in Czechoslovakia. The police prohibited their manufacture after about a hundred had been placed on the market. They are tiny, single-shot pistols of .25 caliber, so small they can easily be carried in a vest pocket.

"The inventor, who had a macabre sense of humor, called his pistol 'the murderess,' because it was so convenient for homicidally inclined ladies to carry in a hand bag. It looks like a toy—but it was with such a toy that poor Cope was killed."

Abruptly Matthew Kelton said to Oakley. "Do you own a Skomak pistol?"

The banker's jaw tightened. "I do."

"Where is it?"

"In the top drawer of my dresser."

"Loaded?"

"Yes; I keep it loaded."

"Did you have it to-night?"

"I did not."

"When did you last see it?"

"I don't remember—exactly. I got it from a New York importing firm several months ago. I practiced target shooting with it on several occasions. It was rather inaccurate at more than about twenty feet. I loaded it, and put it in a small drawer of my dresser, and have had no occasion to take it out since then."

"Then it should be there now."

"Yes."

"Loaded?"

"I'm certain of that."

"What about your other pistol?"

"That is an ordinary, five-shot automatic of a well-know American make. It is in the hip pocket of the gray suit hanging in my closet."

"Sergeant Lester," said Matthew Kelton, "will you

please go up to Mr. Oakley's room and bring back both guns?"

"Yes, Mr. Kelton."

"Let's see, now," said Matthew Kelton, "was Cope armed?"

"No," said Police Captain Lamotte. "Here is a list of the contents of his pockets: A gold watch and chain to one end of which is attached a cigarette lighter. A leather wallet containing nothing but some visiting cards, and forty-two dollars in bills. A white silk handkerchief, with his initials, L. C., on it. A flat pigskin cigarette case, containing four cigarettes. A small paper bag, containing what appears to be raw beefsteak cut into cubes about the size of lumps of sugar—"

"Well, I'm dashed!" exclaimed Matthew Kelton, his eyes brightening. "There's some puzzle here. Let me look at this odd exhibit."

He peered into the paper bag.

"Now, why," he said, "should a well-to-do gentleman like Cope carry a bag of bits of meat in the pocket of his dinner coat?"

"You've got me there," said the police captain.

"Anything else in his pockets?"

"No. Wait a bit. Sergeant Lester did pick up something that must have fallen from Cope's pocket. Here it is."

He handed a small object to Matthew Kelton. It was a black pearl stud, set in platinum.

Quickly Kelton bent over and stared at the body.

"It's not Cope's," he announced. "His studs are plain gold, and they are all in place." He wheeled 'round to Guy Oakley, and thrust the black pearl stud under his eyes.

"Is this yours?" Kelton shot at him.

The banker looked at it with wide eyes. "Yes. That's mine."

"How do you explain its presence here?"

"I can't."

Sergeant Lester came hurrying up.

"Here are the two pistols, Mr. Kelton," he said.

Swiftly Matthew Kelton snapped the safety catch off the automatic, and looked into the magazine. It was full. Then he took the small Skomak pistol, opened it, examined the chamber. The brass butt of a cartridge could be seen. He shook the cartridge out into his hand, and whistled. It had been fired.

Guy Oakley cried wildly, "I tell you it was loaded when last I saw it!"

"It isn't loaded now," said Matthew Kelton grimly. . . . "Great Scott, what is that?"

From the woods came a cry—a long-drawn, moaning, eerie sound. They all started.

Then Evan Turner laughed.

"It's an owl—one of those big horned fellows. The woods around here are full of them this time of year. What a racket he is kicking up! Some night animal, perhaps a lynx, has got hold of him, I suppose."

The owl uttered a series of agonized cries. They stopped, abruptly.

"Another tragedy," muttered Turner.

Matthew Kelton said nothing. He was standing, silent, and his face wore a look of the utmost concentration.

"Imagination," he said.

"What?"

"Nothing. Sergeant Lester?"

"Yes, sir?"

"You made a careful examination of the ground around Cope's body?"

"Every inch of it, within a radius of ten yards or more," the sergeant answered.

"And found nothing?"

"Only that stud."

"How tall, Doctor Ussher, do you think Cope is?"

"Well over six feet."

Matthew Kelton called Police Captain Lamotte to one side.

"Captain," he said, "as a favor to me, I'm going to ask you not to place Mr. Oakley under arrest until to-morrow.

Keep him confined to his house, and watch the house. But don't arrest him."

"You don't mean he isn't guilty?" demanded the policeman. "Why, there's enough evidence against him to swing a couple of men!"

"Granted. If he is guilty, he'll be just as guilty to-morrow as he is to-night. If you don't hear from me by five to-morrow afternoon, arrest him."

"It's taking a chance," the police captain said.

"I'll answer for him," said Matthew Kelton.

"Well," said Captain Lamotte, "you've helped me out a lot of times, and you've never let me down yet. I'll do what you want. But—look here—you've got some theory. What is it?"

Matthew Kelton smiled. "I wouldn't call it a theory," he said. "It's a flight of fancy, a wild, wild speculation. If I told you, you'd think I'd been hitting the hop pipe. Wait till to-morrow!"

He turned to the others.

"I'm going home now," Matthew Kelton said, "and finish my cryptogram. It's a corker."

"Can you hold out any hope?" asked Evan Turner.

"Only a shadow, Evan, I'm afraid. Come to my house to-morrow morning at ten. You'll find me out in my apiary, thinking. The presence of bees always helps me think. Good night."

Evan Turner found Matthew Kelton in the apiary in the garden of his house next morning, sitting on a stool, watching the bees.

"Morning, Evans," said Kelton. "Bees are most interesting people. Spiders, too. I find them a great help in some of my problems. Sometimes, when I have a problem in human conduct, I reduce it to terms of bees or spiders. In the insect world you'll often find the little fellows acting very much as their larger relations, men, act.

"Take certain lady spiders, for example. Invariably, they eat their husbands. The poor husbands appear to know what fate is in store for them if they go a-courting;

but love conquers all, and the gallant little Romeo goes to his rendezvous, and presently serves as a breakfast for his Juliet.

"I watched such a performance last spring, and it suggested a line, by following which, I was able to clear up the bizarre case of Mrs. Marlton and her three poisoned husbands. Now the irrational, but rather human conduct of a certain species of wasp—"

"Matthew," interrupted Evan Turner, nervously, "it's after ten. Let's discuss the ways of wasps some other time. Oakley's life is at stake."

"As I was saying," went on Matthew Kelton calmly, "the conduct of a wasp I witnessed just before you arrived gave me a hint which may be the means of saving Oakley from the gallows."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not going to tell you, Evan," answered Matthew Kelton, with a smile, "I'm going to try to show you. There's a very strong chance I'm entirely wrong. I have gone about the matter in a quite illogical way. I have started with a fantastic theory. Now I must look for hard, concrete facts to back it up. I think I'll take my friend the wasp along with me, for good luck."

Matthew Kelton picked up a specimen card to which was pinned a large wasp. He put it in his pocket.

"Let's be on our way, Evan," he said.

"Where?"

"To Lewis Cope's house."

"What for?"

"Facts," said Matthew Kelton. "We need them."

"Cope lived in a small house on the edge of Briarly Forest," Evan Turner said. "For the last three or four years he was a recluse; practically, a hermit."

"Solitude," observed Matthew Kelton, as they started away in his car, "is dangerous for men with brooding minds."

He said nothing more until they found the house of Lewis Cope, a plain stone box of a place at the end of a lane. Not near any other human habitation.

"Hardly a cheerful place," said Kelton, getting out of his car.

"What do you expect to find here, Matthew?" questioned Evan Turner.

"I'd not be astonished and, indeed, I'd be rather pleased," answered Matthew Kelton, "if I were to find a mouse trap."

The house was deserted. The front door was locked, but the lock soon succumbed to Matthew Kelton's skeleton key, and the two men entered.

The house was simply furnished, and for a man Cope had been a fairly neat housekeeper.

"Let's see what he read," said Kelton, glancing about the living-room. "A man is what he reads, you know."

He shook his head as he looked at the small bookcase. Lewis Cope's library consisted of an old set of the works of Poe, and a fairly new encyclopedia of ornithology in four volumes.

"Queer combination," said Matthew Kelton. "Significant, too. It's a bad sign, Evan, when a man lives all alone, and hasn't a large library."

He wandered out toward the kitchen. A faint, squeaking sound was heard, coming from a small pantry. Matthew Kelton smiled. He pushed open the door, and pointed. There in a corner was a large, old-fashioned mouse trap, of the wire maze type, and it held three live and frightened prisoners. Matthew Kelton set them free and they scampered away.

"So far, so good," he remarked. "Now, for a hasty look at the woodshed, and we're finished here."

He stopped in the kitchen long enough to rummage about in an odds-and-ends drawer. He pounced on something there, took it out, put it in his pocket. The mystified Turner saw that it was nothing more exciting than a small ball of light but strong twine.

Lewis Cope had devoted some of his solitude to sawing wood. It was arranged in neat piles in the shed.

"Nothing here," said Turner.

"No?"

"I don't see a thing but some wood, an ax, a saw, a chopping block, a few rakes and hoes, and an old parrot cage."

Matthew Kelton, humming to himself, was gazing at the cage.

"What do you make of it?" he asked the lawyer.

"I deduce," said Turner, with mock seriousness, "that at one time Cope, in common with many other people who live alone, kept a pet parrot. I further deduce that at some time the bird died or escaped, so he put the cage out here."

"Anything else?"

"I am unable, with the data at hand, to determine the age, sex, or name of the parrot," said Turner.

"Look at the condition of the cage," said Matthew Kelton. "Look at those small red stains. Go on, deduce some more."

Evan Turner surveyed the cage more closely.

"Offhand," he said, "I'd say that Polly met a violent death, and within the past two days. Possibly she said something Cope didn't like, and in a fit of temper he wrung her neck."

All Matthew Kelton said was: "The face of a man, even in death, tells you things about him. Now, I didn't think Cope looked like a man given to uncontrolled outbursts of emotion. He seemed to me to be of the type which has strong, hot passions, but a cold brain which guides them. Come, we must be going."

"Where now?"

"I have an engagement with some friends of mine," said Matthew Kelton, "at the main gate to Oakley's estate."

As the car drew near the house of Guy Oakley, Evan Turner saw a dozen figures in khaki sitting on the wall near the gate. They sprang to attention as Matthew Kelton stopped his car.

"Boy Scouts," said Evan Turner.

"Fox Troop," said Matthew Kelton. "I'm their patron saint."

He got out of the car, and the Scouts gathered about him. Turner saw him talking to them, gesturing, and saw them listening with respectful attention. Then the Scouts trotted away into the woods which bordered the Oakley estate.

Matthew Kelton and the lawyer made their way to the spot beside the main drive where Cope's body had been found.

"If my reasoning is sound," Matthew Kelton said, "and I have rare good luck, we'll know something very soon now. While we're waiting, perhaps you'll let me say a few more words about wasps."

"I'm completely at sea, Matthew," said Evan Turner. "I haven't the least idea what you're getting at. Wasps, mouse traps, empty bird cages, Boy Scouts—now wasps again."

"I'm sane, or almost so," said Matthew Kelton, with a chuckle. "You see, Evan, the scheme of human existence is made up of a myriad of small, trifling things, each unimportant, perhaps, but all necessary to make the complete pattern. We'll start with the wasp."

He took the dead insect out of his pocket.

"This misguided creature strayed into my apiary today," he said, "and as I did not want him there, I cornered him, and took him in my hand to eject him. He flew into a rage and stung me. I was wearing gloves, fortunately. Presently, he died; but I did not kill him. He belongs to that species which can sting but once, and then dies as the result of stinging.

"Now, he knew this. Insects have curiously developed instincts, as, for example, the husband spider, who knows in advance that if he makes love to a lady of his species he is sure to be eaten by her. This wasp, I feel sure, knew that to sting me meant death to him. But his hate was stronger than his sense. Some *men* are like that, Evan."

"What are you suggesting?"

"Samson pulled down the temple on his enemies, even though he had to crush himself in doing it. Love, my dear

Evan, is strong. But there is nothing stronger in life than a good, deep-seated, robust hate. Now let's take a quick review of our case. Cope hated Oakley. Cope lived alone, and brooded. Cope had a hundred chances to shoot Oakley down in the past few years—and didn't do it.

"Why? Because Cope was both cruel and cunning. He wanted to punish Oakley; not merely kill him, but torture him. So the warped mind of Cope worked out a really brilliant scheme. Cope knew that he himself was doomed, that he would die from his disease within a year. It would be small satisfaction to murder Oakley, even if he could do it and escape detection, since Cope himself must soon follow his victim. So Cope decided that he would die, and die in such a way that Oakley would be convicted and hung for his murder—as diabolic a revenge as I ever heard of.

"Cope worked out his plan in minute and careful detail. He was the burglar who visited Oakley's house. He took the plate and jewelry for a blind. His real object was to get hold of Oakley's gun, and fire it, so that when it was found, there'd be an empty cartridge in it. Taking the black pearl stud was probably an inspiration. It would be just one more damning bit of evidence against Oakley when it was found near Cope's body.

"Then Cope picked an evening when he knew Oakley was home and alone. He may even have had the hope that Oakley would actually kill him. Oakley didn't; but Cope provoked him to shout threats and angry words, which the butler heard. Then Cope left the house when he heard the butler shaking the furnace, and shot himself a few yards from Oakley's door, with a pistol exactly like Oakley's.

"The case against Oakley was perfect. Any dumb district attorney, with such evidence, could hang Oakley. You felt that way yourself, Evan. I, myself, at first saw no chance for Oakley to clear himself. Cope had certainly put a noose around his hated enemy's neck. I only looked further into the case to please you—and because I was puzzled by a problem in psychology, namely: Was it pos-

sible for a careful, shrewd man like Oakley to commit so stupid and unplanned a crime?"

"It's an interesting theory, Matthew," said the lawyer, despondently, "but it doesn't wash. It fits into Cope's character—but, one point you can't theorize away: What became of the pistol which killed Cope? Pistols do not vanish into thin air. No weapon was found near the body, as it surely would have been, if Cope had shot himself."

"That," said Matthew Kelton, "brings me to the most ingenious part of Cope's plan, a bit of real creative imagination, Evan. Do you remember the bag of bits of meat in his pocket?"

"Yes."

"That was a clue. It caused me to hazard a fantastic guess—and I'm not sure yet I'm right. Yes—I am. Here comes one of my Boy Scouts on the run."

A bright-eyed boy came panting up, stopped, saluted.

"Well, Freddy?" said Matthew Kelton.

"Got it, sir," said the Scout.

"Take us there," directed Matthew Kelton, and he and the bewildered lawyer followed the Scout into the woods.

Fifty yards in, the Scout stopped, and pointed. The eyes of the two men saw hanging from the lower branches of a pine tree the body of a giant horned owl, two feet tall, with talons the size of a man's hand. The owl had been killed, and partly devoured by some small nocturnal climbing animal. The bird had been unable to defend itself, because a piece of twine, tied about one of its legs, had become entangled in the branches.

"Climb up and carefully release the owl," said Matthew Kelton. The Scout shinned up the tree, and presently the bird fell at the feet of the men. A piece of twine about two feet long was attached to the foot of the dead owl, and at the other end of it was a small pistol.

"It's like Oakley's!" cried Evan Turner.

"Exactly. It's a Skomak, a 'murderess'," said Matthew Kelton "And, look, Evan. The cartridge has been fired.

The bullet you have seen. It was the one which Cope fired into his own heart."

"But—how?"

Matthew Kelton held out the tiny weapon.

"See," he said, "it has a hair trigger. Goes off at a touch. Cope, who was very tall and had unusually long arms, as you may have noticed, held it at arm's length from his chest, and touched the trigger. The little pistol fell from his lifeless hand, and naturally the owl flew away, as Cope knew it would, with the pistol dangling from its foot."

Turner whistled.

"Cope," continued Matthew Kelton, "figured that the owl would head for the woods. There the pistol would be knocked off against a tree and be lost forever, or the owl would get entangled in a branch, and starve to death, or be killed, and in time the string would rot, and the pistol would drop down. Small chance of its ever being found in woods so little frequented."

"But how could Cope keep the owl quiet while he was shooting the pistol?"

"It must have been a tame owl," said Matthew Kelton. "Cope probably caught it when it was just out of the egg, and raised it for this very purpose. A methodical man, Cope. The owl was accustomed to him. He raised it on live mice. He kept it pacified last night by feeding it bits of meat. No doubt he tied it to a bush when he went in to interview Oakley."

Matthew Kilton sighed.

"Poor Cope!" he said. "Like the foolish wasp, he died for hate. I wonder if there will ever be a time when there is no hate in the world. Here, take the owl and the pistol, and go to the house and tell Oakley and the police the story. I'm going home to work on a new puzzle!"

SINCLAIR GLUCK

MIRAGE

CAPTAIN DUFREYNE sat in the big glass-enclosed salon of the Hotel des Rois, his long legs comfortably disposed before him, his lean, brown fingers curled tenaciously about his glass of after-luncheon coffee.

The long, lofty apartment was joyous with sunlight and warm with reflected color from the display of Eastern rugs and fabrics at the far end. And the captain was well content. He had lunched well. He was comfortable. And he was indulging two favorite hobbies at one and the same time: the bitter-sweet tang of excellent coffee was on his tongue; the veiled light of interested speculation was in his eyes.

Victim of a famous phrase concerning the passing of certain persons unnecessary to specify, Captain Dufreyne had been invalided out of the army of France many months after Verdun. Such of his friends as saw him after convalescence—and they were few—spoke of him as a changed man. There were stories—whispered stories—of a savage bitterness of spirit which had carried the discarded soldier of France into strange waters—and out again. But suddenly the stories ceased—lacking an object. For the captain had packed up one day nad disappeared from his old haunts. His friends saw him no more.

As a matter of fact the captain had drifted first to Algeria. Afterward there were many proprietors of funny little hotels in bizarre corners of the world who came to know the lean, powerful, limping figure and the bitter, weather-bronzed face.

(Copyright, 1926, by Pictorial Review, New York.)

But since the first visit each returning Spring and tourist season found the captain in Biskra. The place and the tourists together stroked his humor almost to the point of purring—the type of purring which may or may not terminate abruptly in a savage bite. Perhaps he found the combination propitious to his peculiar gifts. The War had robbed him of a career. Biskra supplied another of sorts, sometimes enthralling if less ostensible, and considerably less glorious.

At the moment he was occupied in an unobtrusive study of a group of three people who sat facing him on a lounge at the side of the room. He was interested. His mind, in contrast to the stillness of his wasted body, was acutely active, absorbing details with an almost machine-like avidity.

The older woman he dismissed with little more than the glance which tabulated her short, voluminous person and her comfortable, insipid face. The young man who occupied the other wing of the group was the object of a longer scrutiny, skilfully interrupted before it could make itself felt, embracing now the pointed tan shoes and smart, collarless sport suit, now the sleek, dark head and the imperfectly veiled admiration in the hot-looking brown eyes as they flitted over the face of the girl beside him.

On her the captain allowed his own intermittent regard to rest longest. He took in the slender, pink-stockinged limbs crossed so carelessly—or not? He observed that the simple Spring costume looked expensive. And he studied, not without approval, the pretty, vivacious, young face, willful in repose perhaps, but now most inviting with laughter.

Finally, with the slightest lifting of his veiling brown lids, he studied the pearls which circled the slim, round throat. The sheen of refracted sunlight throbbing through the long room threw them into glowing relief against the warmer flesh. They were exceptionally lovely, those pearls. Almost certainly they were genuine.

The girl turned from her companion and swept the

sunny court beyond the windows with a lilting blue glance beneath faintly puckered brows. In a flash of insight the captain found himself abruptly in touch with her mood.

Algeria in Springtime is a land of enchantment. It is as tho all the magic potions of all the necromancers had been spilled upon the sharp blue air, to be evaporated by the profligate, all-penetrating sunlight, and wafted on sweet, uncertain breezes to the nostrils and thence to the heart of the dense but willing Occidental passing by.

It is a land of romance. And in Biskra, on the very rim of the desert, there is romance in the reposeful faces, the handsome eyes, even the strong brown hands of the stately, white-clad Arabs. There is the very color and flavor of romance in white buildings against an imperial sky, in brown mud walls, baked by the sun, set in slovenly guardianship over gardens of palms and flowering apricots and orange-trees.

Mystery and romance find subtle tongues in the rustle and stir of life behind the jealous brown walls of Arab houses. And there, beyond the palm-fringed town, are the red-brown mountains, bleak and bare, remote with long, blue shadows toward evening, lying out on the brown plains like wrinkles of deep sleep upon the hot, stark bosom of Africa.

In Biskra, reflected the captain, one felt the colorful world turning vastly beneath one. And some of the daze and dazzle of that smooth, tremendous motion had crept into the girl's blue eyes all unaware.

His glance returned to the pearls at her throat, and his lids drooped a shade lower, while into the half-obscured gray eyes crept an expression of intense concentration.

The young Frenchman was talking easily.

"But, of course!" he was saying. "It is the season devoted to removing his money from the tourist without pain."

"They do it very badly, then!" Miss Shaw retorted. "I'd pay a lot more than that to see the real thing. But I don't like fakes!"

"But you see, Mademoiselle Estelle," he explained lazily, "you wanted to see the dances, so I must take you, mustn't I?"

He smiled past her at Mrs. Shaw, and the girl gave him a swift, speculative glance which he failed to catch.

"Well, I was very much disappointed," she observed. "I thought they were going to be interesting. Instead of that you take me to see a lot of stupid street women"—a fluttering exclamation from Mrs. Shaw passed unnoticed—"who cannot dance. And now you tell me quite calmly that these dances are arranged for the tourists and aren't the real thing at all!" There was an edge to the young voice..

Briarre assumed a most penitent expression, back of which lurked a smile, "I am so sorry!" he murmured.

The girl instantly shifted her method of attack.

"I don't believe you're a bit sorry," she pouted, laughing; "and there must be something really interesting and exciting to see in a place like this!"

Philippe Briarre turned away from her, his expression lazily reflective. At once the girl's swift glance embraced the lines of his head for a vaguely acquisitive instant. The young Frenchman had for her, as for many women, very much the type of charm one feels in a slick, sturdy little horse. Lacking imagination, Estelle was apt to sweep on to the acquisitive instinct which often tries to fill its place. But his reflective mood had not escaped her.

"You were born here!" she accused suddenly. "You told me so! And you must know all about everything. But, of course, if you don't want to bother——"

The Frenchman's caressing brown eyes flashed down into hers, momentarily warming the core of a small, cool heart.

"My dear little partner, of course I know the place. And there are exciting things to see, perhaps. But——"

"But what, Philippe? And—I'm not your partner any longer, you know!"

His answering "Poor me!" brought a ripple of mirth. But the girl was not to be diverted.

"But what?" she persisted. "Anyhow, will you or won't you show me something really exciting?"

An amused regard from the expressive brown eyes failed to answer her. As she turned away they stole a glance of appreciation at the slender figure and pretty ankles.

"Well," he replied slowly. "I'll see what I can do. It may be a little dangerous, however, and your mother may not——"

"I said 'me' not 'us,' Philippe. It wouldn't amuse mother. When will you take me?"

"I cannot tell until I make same inquiries," he told her thoughtfully. "Perhaps tomorrow night——" he shook his head, frowning doubtfully.

Estelle jumped to her feet. She was daughter to a man who had known how to wait. Hence affluence and this European trip with a widowed and bewildered mother as chaperon. And she had inherited her father's gift.

"It's a promise, then!" she announced gaily. "Come on, Mama, our camels are waiting and I just love joggling about on the funny things!"

She gathered up her long, flimsy coat, and made lithely for the vestibule and the white outdoors with her two companions in tow, the one smiling, the other permanently flustered and resigned to it.

Now, the captain understood English better than he spoke it. He had overheard most of their conversation. And where he could not catch the words, his quick eyes and the expressive, mobile lips of the two young people had filled in the hiatus.

As they faded from his ken, he crossed his legs in some satisfaction. "Simple people," he reflected; "first trip, probably. Met the young fellow on the boat——"

As far as he went he was correct. The Shaws had come to London first, and after a little sightseeing had discovered that they were doing England out of season, and that every one else was fleeing the deplorable climate. They had taken a Dutch boat from Southampton to Algiers and Estelle had danced with M. Briarre and played deck-tennis with him the next day and other days, both

finding the game delightfully adapted to the display of white teeth and pretty young limbs under swirling skirts.

So the duty of escorting the young Americaine had passed smoothly out of the fluttering hands of Mrs. Shaw into the warm, brown paws of a Frenchman with an "air" and an extensive knowledge of English.

Presently the captain got to his feet, limped out of the hotel, and made his way to Count Laudin's garden, the loveliest of monuments to an ideal of natural beauty. He picked up an Arab friend there. The two found seats beside one of the clean-swept, elevated paths. And there they spent the afternoon, first in arriving at a guarded and highly confidential agreement, to judge by their carefully lowered voices, and later in that desultory philosophizing dear to the heart of Islam. But when evening began to add its scented chill to the quiet beneath the sleepy trees, he rose and limped back to the hotel.

That night the three people who had aroused his interest left the hotel together. So the captain went to bed. He was in his accustomed place with his accustomed glass of coffee on the following night. Again the two Americans and the Frenchman sat near him after dinner. And now the girl looked a little flushed. Also there was a glitter of some emotion—uneasiness perhaps—in the brown eyes of her attentive companion.

A little after nine Miss Shaw and her mother had a short discussion as to the latter's need of rest. In a few moments Mrs. Shaw said good night as gracefully as she could and left them, succumbing as usual to the stronger will of her daughter.

Half an hour later Briarre made a remark in an undertone. Estelle jumped to her feet, caught up her cloak, and made for the moonlit street, ignoring the somewhat reluctant movements of her escort.

The captain rose and limped after them. And as they moved away from the garishly Occidental hotel into the mysterious Arabian night, he stood beneath the arching

white colonnade in front of the hotel and watched them go, his eyes intent, a speculative smile on his thin lips.

Abruptly his glance met that of one of the white-clad Arabs lounging before the hotel. The man eyed him stonily for an instant, then turned and strode away, his white burnoose swinging behind him in graceful folds. So the captain went back to his seat and his second glass of coffee. There was a suppressed gleam in his own eyes now as they swept the almost deserted room.

Briarre led his companion to the rear of the hotel and into the long road, lined with mud walls, which wound its leisurely way into the three Arab villages known as old Biskra. Over the crumbling walls the palms stretched shadowy, graceful branches, as tho seeking to regard more closely the two young Occidentals who ventured by night into an alien world.

Between the fronds the moon peered down, splashing their backs with silver that clung for an inquisitive instant, then slipped to the ground behind them. The night breeze, moving softly upon some small, personal errand, carried a medley of strange, faint odors to their nostrils, whispered on either hand an instant, and passed on.

To the girl, unimaginative as she was, came a sudden lilt of excitement. An instant of clear vision, welcome in its very contrast, showed her the lawn at home, the friendly elms, the softer sunlight, even the clumsy ice-wagon, dripping its slow way along their street.

A touch on her arm, a whisper. The vision had faded.

For an instant she hesitated, her dubious glance intent upon the hand of Fatima, which spread its stubby, indented fingers on the moonlit mud wall above the yawning doorway.

"Come along," whispered Briarre.

She moved reluctantly forward into the darkness.

Suddenly a close prisoner, less from the utter obscurity than from the stifling smell, she came to an abrupt halt and stood tensely poised in indecision.

Out of the darkness ahead of her loomed the shadowy

form of Briarre. She caught her breath. He was talking to a white-clad figure which lacked a head! She caught a faint gleam of white teeth and laughed sharply. The man was a negro, waiting bareheaded in the shadowy entrance.

She felt Briarre's fingers on her arm.

"Come along, Estelle," he whispered; "it's all right, I think. They're just going to begin. But I was a fool to bring you here, all the same!"

Curiously enough, the words gave her courage. In a sense, this was more familiar ground.

"If you're afraid," she murmured disdainfully, "why did you come? Anyway, I'm going through with it now we're here! Where do we go?"

"This way!"

Stumbling over the uneven floor, she sniffed the close air of the place with curious, reluctant nostrils. Her foot struck a rough lintel, and she emerged into a ragged little court which even the flooding moonlight failed to beautify.

The flitting, white-robed figure of the negro led on into the velvet darkness of another room beyond. They followed. Now Briarre drew her slowly to the left, and they came to a halt in response to a guttural sentence in broken French, barked down at them mysteriously from the obscurity above their heads.

Briarre's warm fingers closed over hers.

"There's a sort of ladder here," he explained, directing her hand until it brushed a wooden step. "Wait, I'll strike a match!"

The flare of it showed her a steep little staircase leading into a black square out of which the teeth and eyes of the negro gleamed down at her. An obscure panic caught at her heart. But a glance at the warm, vital face of the young Frenchman beside her set the pendulum of her emotions swinging back to confidence.

She mounted lightly, looking back and down only once, to be sure that her companion was close behind.

The air was fresher in the room above. As she stepped

out upon the level floor of it she could distinguish its four bare walls by the aid of a faint orange light which stole beneath a closed door opposite. Briarre joined her.

Light streamed into their faces abruptly as the negro opened the door ahead of them. The Frenchman took her arm. And now that the darkness lay behind she walked forward calmly enough into the lighted room.

Estelle received a blurred impression of several dim lamps; of rugs and fabrics spread on the floor about the walls; of white-clad, squatting figures with startling black faces. Their guide indicated two empty chairs at the far end. They moved forward. The atmosphere of the place, heavy with smoke and incense, seemed to swirl lazily about them as they advanced.

Seated and faced about, the girl drew upon her store of conscious Anglo-Saxon superiority and peered calmly about her. Everywhere she looked she met the faint gleam of teeth and black, white-rimmed pupils fixed upon her. As her glance moved on, the smile faded slowly from each black face. But the stare remained, expressionless, almost animal in its fixed vacancy.

They had come there as spectators. But she could not shake off the feeling that she and her companion had been thrust, at least temporarily, into the rôle of performers, this ring of animal faces their incalculable audience.

They were alone at this end of the room, the blacks squatting on their haunches or seated cross-legged about the other three sides. Estelle noticed a particularly dark-faced Arab, pock-marked, down-looking, seated, and leaning back against the wall to her left. He reminded her of a depressed-looking vulture she had once seen. A considerable space separated him from the nearest negro.

In the far corner a tom-tom burst into a blare of sound then settled to a steady throbbing, the resonant din dashing and clashing through the little room, until the thick, confined air seemed writhing alive with it. An infernal, squealing bray swung abruptly into rough step with the

drum, making a combined assault upon her sensitive Western ears.

"For Heaven's sake, what is it?" she cried.

Briarre leaned over until his lips touched the curling fringe of her bobbed hair.

"Sort of Sudanese bagpipe," he explained, "made out of goatskin. Look! they're going to begin now!"

The Arab had made an abrupt gesture. Four of the black men rose to their feet and stepped forward. They faced one another for a moment, then began a series of clumsy movements, vague and apparently meaningless. She looked in vain for any sign of self-consciousness in their faces, any sign of a definite purpose or symbolism in the dance. Their features were set and expressionless. In the slowly rolling eyes was visible only a dull, inward contemplation.

One by one other negroes joined them, stamping and bending forward, flinging out their elbows in grotesque gestures, bending far back.

The beat of the tom-tom quickened. The tormented clamor of the bagpipe rose half a dozen notes in pitch and squealed on to a quicker measure aimlessly rising and falling.

The dance quickened too. Dust contended with smoke and incense and noise for possession of the overladen air. Some one from the far end had moved forward with a number of sticks. He was gliding in and out among the dancers, distributing his burden. The sticks were accepted absently, the negroes holding them out from their bodies as they danced, as tho uncertain what to do with them.

One of the pendent weapons swung out and thumped against a brown limb. There was a flurry of swift movement. The sticks began to flash, cracking against other sticks, thumping on muscular bodies.

Inarticulate cries, brief, lamenting howls, punctuated the rhythm of the dance. Sweat shone on the foreheads of the dancers and drew glistening scars down their black, distorted faces.

The place was stifling.

Again the dance quickened. Like men in a daze, the negroes dispersed to the sides of the room, flung down their sticks, tore off their turbans and burnooses.

In an instant they had assembled again, stark and repellent in loin-cloths only, their shining muscular bodies swaying and jerking to the throbbing clamor of the tom-tom and bagpipe, their faces savage and intent. Each carried a tiny knife. The dance began again, the knives flashing dimly.

The white girl shrank close to her escort. "Let's go now," she whispered. "I don't like it very much. I've seen enough. What are they going to do now, Philippe?"

"Wait," he counseled quickly; "You wanted to see the real thing. This is it! Watch them!"

Estelle's reluctant glance returned to the glistening, savage faces of the dancers. They were leaping now, waving their little knives in the air, drawing slowly nearer.

Her eyes recoiled from a naked, muscular body.

Suddenly she gasped and shrank back. One of the negroes had stabbed himself in the leg, and the blood was oozing in a slow, shining stream that jerked nearer his foot with each leap. Now he clapped his hand to the wound, and with a howl drew his palm down across his mouth, eagerly lapping the crimson moisture.

Shuddering, she turned to look at the others. They, too, had begun to stab themselves. To her nostrils came the odor of sweat and the sickening blood-scent. They were close to her.

Directly in front of her danced a giant of a man. Her fascinated glance was drawn to his face. Unlike the others, his eyes were intent on hers.

Stark panic seized her. She leaped to her feet and away from him, catching at Briarre's arm with both hands.

"Tell them to stop!" she cried, shuddering. "I want to go home."

"Hush!" he interrupted softly. "Sit down! You'll make trouble! Look!"

She turned her head, engulfed in a wave of terror.

The giant negro stood before her, his bloodshot eyes savagely intent on hers, his flat nostrils dilated like those of a running horse.

"Sit down," came an urgent whisper. "Clap your hands!"

Estelle sank into her chair again, her terrified brain automatically registering his commands. But applause was beyond her.

Her hypnotized regard fixed on the savage face of the negro, she heard Briarre clapping his hands encouragingly. But the big Sudanese still towered above her. His heaving naked breast, streaked with blood and sweat, shut out her view, shut out everything.

Abruptly the black hulk of the man swerved and receded to a vast distance. Lights and color and clamoring din rushed together like contending waves, crested—faded—were engulfed.

With a little moan she slipped from her chair and lay, a limp, huddled figure, on the dusty floor.

Eons later she found herself drifting upward out of some vast, dim gulf. A shadowy figure floated beside her. She was aware of kisses—kisses disturbingly convincing from anything so nebulous. She opened her eyes. And that momentary impression of kisses was swept away in a flood of sickening recollection.

She lay huddled together on a rug. Briarre was bending above her. She saw that one end of his collar stuck out from the side of his neck. It gave him a surprisingly dissipated appearance. She raised her head a little. The Frenchman's hair and clothing were disheveled, in strong contrast to his usual neatness. Her glance passed on, to encounter four brownish walls very close to them, for the room was tiny.

She raised herself on one elbow, and Briarre sat back on his heels. They stared at each other.

"What—what happened?"

"You're all right now?—not hurt?" he countered.

She shook her head.

"We're in a bit of a box!" he volunteered, giving her a wry smile. "I paid them well to do that dance for us. But they're as sensitive as children—and as irresponsible!"

"But—I don't understand. . . ."

"They were worked up, excited, Estelle! You offended them, you see. That big negro was only showing his resentment. I realize that now. But when you fainted I'm afraid I lost my head a bit. Anyhow, I knocked him down. Then the lot of them fell on me. I hadn't much chance, of course. They were half drunk, knives were flashing, and things began to look ugly. So—I surrendered!"

He grinned uncomfortably. "As it was, I was lucky to get out with a whole skin!"

"But—where are we?"

"Same house. They carted us in here, all jabbering at once, and left us. By the sounds they've gone on with their dance. I shouldn't have trusted that swine of an Arab. Left alone, I don't believe the blacks would have dared go any further. As it was, they took every cent I had on me, and I'm afraid they've got your necklace and rings. I'm sure the Arab engineered that part of it. But I'll make them regret this as long as they live, if it takes me a year!"

Estelle's hand flew to her throat. The necklace was gone. She saw that her fingers were bare of rings. But the recollection of that huge negro—the knowledge that she was still in the same house with him—loomed infinitely darker than her loss.

"You don't mean we're prisoners!" she whispered.

"For to-night, I'm afraid. To-morrow they'll come to their senses and realize the trouble they're laying up for themselves."

"But—what do they want with us?"

Estelle got to her feet and ran to the rough door. It was locked. She whirled on Briarre, her pretty face drawn and bitter with fear.

"What are they going to do to us?" she moaned. Briarre caught her hands. "Don't be frightened!" he urged. "We are in a civilized country under the French Government. It won't take those negroes long to come to their senses."

"But—suppose they kill us, Philippe?" she moaned. "Philippe, what are we going to do?"

The young Frenchman turned away and began automatically adjusting his disheveled attire. He tried to hide the gravity of his expression in a smile as he faced her again.

"There's nothing we can do but wait."

As he spoke the latch of the door rattled. Estelle caught at and clung to his arm, her wide eyes on the slowly moving door.

It swung open at last. Framed in the doorway, his arms folded, stood the powerful-looking Arab who had directed the dance. The man's dark, threatening glance moved from Briarre's face to the girl's and back again. He moved slowly forward into the room, closing the door behind him.

They faced him in silence. In a moment he began to speak to Briarre in guttural French. Estelle's companion answered him calmly at first, then with a threat in his eyes and voice. The Arab shook his head. He spoke again. Briarre answered him in a flood of fierce words. Then they both began to talk at once, gesticulating, their voices loud and furious.

Estelle could grasp only a word here and there, for she knew little French. She thought the Arab was urging something and Briarre angrily refusing. It came home to her that her fate depended upon the tact and cunning of this excited young Frenchman.

"Oh, what is it?" she cried. "What does he want?"

Briarre caught the note of helpless terror in her voice. His eyes flashed; and with a sudden little spring he flung himself forward at the Arab's throat.

Small hands to her cheeks, Estelle retreated to the wall

and crouched there, her wide, fascinated gaze never leaving the two men as they struggled and strained together, now almost motionless, now darting into swift movement, as one or other sought to shift his grip. She caught the growling and grunting of each combatant and cowered as they struggled. She shrank to the glint of intent savage eyes.

Swiftly, so swiftly that she saw only a blur of movement, the Arab gave ground, tripped and fell with a crash. His burnoose momentarily enveloped his opponent. But Briarre thrust it aside, and she saw that his knees were on the arms of the Arab, his fingers fast about the man's throat.

Squirming and twisting, his loose garments half-way up his naked brown legs, the man tried in vain to loosen the Frenchman's grip. Some primitive spot in Estelle's being drifted uppermost, and watched his tongue protrude, watched the ferocity fade to despair and terror in the man's black eyes. Now the eyes rolled upward, horribly—

With a tiny shriek Estelle ran forward and plucked at the Frenchman's arm.

"Stop! You'll kill him!"

Half dazed, he looked up at her, then stiffly loosened his grip and sprang to his feet.

"Quick, then!"

He ran to the door. Estelle was close at his heels. Abruptly he turned on her.

"Wait. Stay here until I see if the coast is clear. No good running into the pack of them."

"Oh! Don't leave me alone with that——"

"Wait, I say!"

Involuntarily she fell back. Briarre opened the door cautiously, then darted through, closing it softly behind him.

Close against the wall again Estelle waited, her reluctant gaze on the Arab's distorted, motionless face. Moment after moment passed in silence, except for the slow rattle and wheeze from the man's laboring lungs.

The door creaked on its hinges suddenly, bringing a

smothered cry to her lips. Briarre darted into the room and caught her hand, then loosened her fingers abruptly, ran to the Arab and stripped off his burnoose, fumbling the limp figure over and over in the dust. In an instant he had stepped into it.

"Come on," he whispered.

Hand in hand the two crept through the door into the musty darkness of another room. Estelle followed blindly the guidance of his hand, her heart in her mouth.

They were in a third room now. Here the girl discerned a faint streak of moonlight stealing through a chink in the wall. Curiously, that one pale ray restored her courage. For the moonlight seemed to whisper: "This is no limitless cavern of darkness and horror, but only a tumbledown Arab house with boarded windows. Safety and civilization are close at hand!"

From somewhere behind them came a murmur of voices and a muffled stamping of feet. But Estelle realized suddenly that she had been hearing these vague sounds all along.

Briarre had opened a door into a room that was pale and mysterious with reflected moonlight. In an instant they were across it and stumbling out upon a flat roof, the pale moon eying them curiously, the vaster night sky arching above them.

Staring down and along, the Frenchman led her to a rough flight of mud steps. A moment later they were in the little court.

Now came a groping, hurried progress through that dark, ill-smelling entrance, and the door swung reluctantly open, setting them free at last to the moonlight and the world of outdoors.

Still without venturing to speak, Briarre drew the girl close to his side, so that the voluminous burnoose almost enveloped her, and set off at a brisk, stumbling pace for the hotel, his arm about her waist.

They hurried along in silence until the walls of Vieux Biskra no longer rose about them. Now Briarre slackened his pace a little and looked up.

A cloud had momentarily obscured the moon.

"Look," he whispered, "rain-clouds, Estelle! 'C'est L'or qui tombe!' That's what the Arabs say when it rains, dear. 'It is gold falling!' For it is a bitter, barren country this. And, by Jove, you've tasted the flavor of it tonight!"

But Estelle, frightened at the sudden darkness, had looked back. And she caught at his arm in sudden terror.

"Philippe! Someone's after us! Look!"

He whirled in time to catch a glimpse of a flitting white figure, just vanishing behind a jutting wall. Otherwise the road they had taken was empty and still. Again he drew her close to him and they hurried along in apprehensive silence, stumbling and glancing back at brief intervals, until the roofs of the larger hotels came into sight, gleaming white in the moonlight for the cloud had passed.

Now Briarre stopped, flung off the burnoose, and tossed it over the mud wall which lined the road.

"There," he cried, using the garment as a symbol, "we're well out of that! I was mad to take you there at all!" His voice was harsh with self-reproach.

Estelle looked up at him, her eyes dreamy. The spell of the adventure still gripped her senses. Freedom and safety were sweet.

"Never mind," she whispered, "you got me out again! You were just wonderful!"

Abruptly, hungrily, he stooped and kissed her. But she pushed him away.

"The hotel! Please!" she murmured confusedly.

Recognizing the promise in her words, Briarre caught her hand close in his and strode on.

It was not yet eleven when the two entered the hotel. But the long salon was deserted except for the slouching figure of Captain Dufreyne, seated in his usual chair and staring aimlessly at the wall.

He looked up at them as they entered, and they moved down the room toward him, their pace abruptly slow and uncertain. For each had hoped to find the place deserted.

Under half-closed lids the captain studied the girl. He saw that her neck was bare of pearls and his eyes gleamed suddenly. Then, like a man well satisfied with his day's work, he leaned back in his chair and tactfully closed his eyes.

Briarre was cursing under his breath. Now he drew the girl to a halt and swung her round to face him.

"Look here," he whispered, "my room is just beyond that door. We can't talk here. Could you . . ."

Estelle had not yet returned to her normal daytime point of view. Her blood was singing in her veins, sweetly, confusedly.

"But, of course—for a minute!" she murmured.

He turned at once and she followed him glancing nonchalantly about her as tho she had never been there before.

In a moment they passed out of the door which led to the long hotel hallway. But the captain did not stir, did not even trouble to open his eyes as they disappeared.

Briarre closed and locked his bedroom door behind them, then turned with a whimsical smile.

"Not to keep you in," he explained, "but to keep any one else out."

She nodded, facing him uncertainly. He moved vaguely nearer, and she began to speak hurriedly.

"Tell me," she urged, "tell me what he wanted, that Arab? I could not follow, you spoke so fast!"

Briarre hesitated and came to a halt before her. The light in his eyes faded a little as his thoughts reverted from the delectable present to their recent adventure.

"Wanted to keep us prisoners there until I gave him a letter to the manager of the hotel, asking for five thousand francs. Otherwise they would cart us off into the desert. But the scheme went wrong!"

He laughed with a note of triumph.

Estelle vaguely recalled the repetition of the words "cinq milles" in their momentous conversation.

"But they would be caught afterward!"

Briarre shook his head.

"Not so easy! That Arab travels light, I imagine. He would be far away in the desert by morning. And the negroes are just nomads, here to-day and gone to-morrow. Anyhow, how many of them could we describe accurately, or even identify? They look so much alike."

"But my pearls, then!" cried the girl suddenly, "and my rings!"

Briarre's young face hardened. "Don't you worry! I'll get your trinkets back for you to-morrow, or know the reason why!"

"Trinkets!" she cried. "Do you call pearls and emeralds and diamonds 'trinkets'?" There was an edge to her voice.

Briarre stared up at her. "Pearls!" he repeated stupidly. "Do you mean to say that necklace was real?—and you wore it to a place like that?"

"Of course they're real—and extremely valuable!" cried Estelle. "So are my rings."

She watched the blank astonishment on his face turn swiftly to consternation and then to grim purpose. And as she looked she noticed, for the first time, the ugly, swollen bruise above his temple. A swift revulsion swept over her, bringing a soft glow to her eyes.

"This business was bad enough," Briarre was muttering, "but to have you lose something of value through me——"

He eyed her with a sudden hunger, then moved past her toward the door. Estelle caught at his arm.

"Wait! Where are you going?" she whispered.

"I'm going back to get those 'trinkets'!" he burst out bitterly. "I'll buy them or take them by force."

"And leave me here?" she laughed, adding more softly, "like this?"

He looked down into her eyes. His own blazed suddenly plunging deep into the answering glow he saw there. In an instant she was in his arms.

Her eyes closed. Her head fell back. And her pretty pallid face assumed an expression curiously, remotely

bitter as she surrendered lips and eyes and cheeks to his kisses.

Suddenly they stiffened, eyed each other, then sprang apart in consternation.

Some one was knocking softly at the door. And at the same instant both realized that the knocking had been going on for some moments—was growing louder.

Briarre stared about the room, his eyes wild with alarm. "Quick," he whispered, pointing to the tiny bathroom, the open doorway of which was covered by a curtain. "Get in there until I see what it is!"

Estelle ran past him and disappeared. He turned, looked over his shoulder until he saw that the concealing curtain had ceased to move, and then unlocked his door, flinging it wide.

"Eh bien?" he began sharply, adding in swift surprise "Monsieur?"

Captain Dufreyne bowed and advanced into the room in his best grand manner. In spite of himself the younger man stood aside.

"I haf comb," explained the captain in broken but courteous English, "to spik of pearls!"

Wrath and amazement fought for supremacy on Briarre's face. "Quoi?" he ejaculated.

There was a gleam of sardonic humor in the captain's gray eyes as he repeated his remark—slowly and distinctly.

Briarre drew himself up, his face dangerous.

"If this is a joke——" he began.

But he never finished his sentence. The captain's long arm darted forward, there was a flurry of movement, and with a howl of anguish Briarre found himself facing away from the intruder, his arm painfully twisted and helpless behind him. He gave vent to another howl, this time of rage, as he felt the captain's free hand fumbling at his pockets.

But when, out of the tail of his eye, he saw the necklace flash into the air and dangle, gleaming, from the cap-

tain's brown fingers, he began to curse, softly, steadily, in a vitriolic stream hardly louder than a whisper.

"Now," interrupted Captain Dufreyne pleasantly, "we go to ze managaire! And we leaf the door open, not? Zere is nozzing longer to hide! So—now—any person can pass in—or out. Eh, mon ami?"

There was a sound of heavy breathing for a moment, then a retreating shuffle of feet. Estelle peered out into an empty room.

An instant later she had slipped into the hall and away.

After breakfast next morning the captain had hardly settled himself in his accustomed place when the door from the hall opened to admit two porters laden with luggage. They were followed by a smart-looking but slightly pallid young Frenchman.

The eyes of the two Frenchmen met. And the lips of the departing guest bubbled with a scalding, searing observation only just audible. The captain rose to his feet with surprising lightness and agility. Whereupon Briarre favored him with a single venomous glance and scuttled out in pursuit of his luggage.

Half an hour later the captain glanced up to find the girl standing before him. He sprang courteously to his feet and bowed.

"I came to thank you for my jewels!" she explained breathlessly. "The manager returned them to me this morning!"

"Please!" he deprecated, "eet ees nozzing."

"Oh, but it is!" she urged. "I never dreamed——" she broke off in confusion.

The captain smiled down at her. "You see," he explained, "I deed not lak hees face."

"But how could you know? How did you guess that he had my things?"

"Zat was not guess, Mademoiselle! I know somezing of dis Arab. Wiz him he talk long tam yesterday. So—I send a man to—look over you last night. Zat was all arrange', dance an' everything! He deed not hurt his frien' ze

Arab. When he lef' you for a moment after, a black was waiting to give him ze jewels. Zat was arrange' because —you might not become fainted!"

Estelle dropped her eyes, shuddered.

"But—I sink he would haf return' dem to-day," the captain hurried on. "I sink—it is you he want, Mademoiselle! Onlee—he mak' sure of you—or ze jewels, is it not?"

Estelle looked up. It was easy to see that she had been crying. And there was a gentle, comprehending light in the eyes smiling down at her.

Estelle observed that the captain was very good looking. He had an "air."

She looked away and back again. Into the sweetness of her smile had crept an acquisitive gleam not altogether unfamiliar to the captain.

"But you are simply wonderful!" she breathed. "And it was so amazingly kind of you to take so much interest in—poor little me!" Her glance, faintly provocative, met his eyes for an instant, then swerved over his bronzed face, absorbing it swiftly.

Slowly, perhaps with reluctance, the captain's manner became inordinately polite.

"Bot you do not onnerstan', Miss!" he smiled. "Eet ees my—duty!"

Estelle gasped.

"A—a detective?"

The captain bowed.

"Oh! Oh, I see," she faltered. "But then—you—I must reward you—oh!" she broke off and turned away.

"Not necessity, Miss," returned the captain softly. "I am well paid. But—somezing for ze ozzer employes, eef you lak—in ze manager's box, n'est ce pas?"

"I will, of course," Estelle assured him rapidly. She began to move away, hesitated, spoke over her shoulder.

"Thank you very much," she said faintly.

"Eet ees pleasure!" the captain assured the back of her head.

Alone again, he moved to the side of the room and rang a bell. A waiter popped into sight.

"Café noir," said the captain briefly, and resumed his seat. His favorite drink possessed a faintly bitter flavor most eminently suited to his mood.

EDGAR JEPSON AND ROBERT EUSTACE

THE TEA-LEAF

ARTHUR KELSTERN and George Willoughton met in the Turkish bath in Duke Street, St. James's, and rather more than a year later in that Turkish bath they parted. Both of them were bad-tempered men, Kelstern cantankerous and Willoughton violent. It was indeed difficult to decide which was the worse-tempered; and when I found that they had suddenly become friends, I gave that friendship three months. It lasted nearly a year.

When they did quarrel they quarrelled about Kelstern's daughter Ruth. Willoughton fell in love with her and she with him and they became engaged to be married. Six months later, in spite of the fact that they were plainly very much in love with one another, the engagement was broken off. Neither of them gave any reason for breaking it off. My belief was that Willoughton had given Ruth a taste of his infernal temper and got as good as he gave.

Not that Ruth was at all a Kelstern to look at. Like the members of most of the old Lincolnshire families, descendants of the Vikings and the followers of Canute, one Kelstern is very like another Kelstern, fair-haired, clear-skinned, with light blue eyes and a good bridge to the nose. But Ruth had taken after her mother: she was dark with a straight nose, dark-brown eyes of the kind often described as liquid, dark-brown hair, and as kissable lips as ever I saw. She was a proud, rather self-sufficing, high-spirited girl, with a temper of her own. She needed it to live with that cantankerous old brute Kelstern. Oddly enough in spite of the fact that he always would try to bully her, she was fond of him; and I will say

(Copyright, 1925, by Edgar Jepson and E. R. Barton.)

for him that he was very fond of her. Probably she was the only creature in the world of whom he was really fond. He was an expert in the application of scientific discoveries to industry; and she worked with him in his laboratory. He paid her five hundred a year, so that she must have been uncommonly good.

He took the breaking off of the engagement very hard indeed. He would have it that Willoughton had jilted her. Ruth took it hard too: her warm colouring lost some of its warmth; her lips grew less kissable and set in a thinner line. Willoughton's temper grew worse than ever; he was like a bear with a perpetually sore head. I tried to feel my way with both him and Ruth with a view to help to bring about a reconciliation. To put it mildly, I was rebuffed. Willoughton swore at me; Ruth flared up and told me not to meddle in matters that didn't concern me. Nevertheless my strong impression was that they were missing one another badly and would have been glad enough to come together again if their stupid vanity could have let them.

Kelstern did his best to keep Ruth furious with Willoughton. One night I told him—it was no business of mine; but I never did give a tinker's curse for his temper—that he was a fool to meddle and had much better leave them alone. It made him furious, of course; he would have it that Willoughton was a dirty hound and a low blackguard—at least those were about the mildest things he said of him. It struck me of a sudden that there must be something much more serious in the breaking off of the engagement than I had guessed.

That suspicion was strengthened by the immense trouble Kelstern took to injure Willoughton. At his clubs, the Athenæum, the Devonshire, and the Savile, he would display an astonishing ingenuity in bringing the conversation round to Willoughton; then he would declare that he was a scoundrel and a blackguard of the meanest type. Of course it did Willoughton harm, though not nearly as much harm as Kelstern desired, for Willoughton knew his job as few engineers knew it; and it is very hard indeed

to do much harm to a man who really knows his job. People have to have him. But of course it did him some harm; and Willoughton knew that Kelstern was doing it. I came across two men who told me that they had given him a friendly hint. That did not improve Willoughton's temper.

An expert in the construction of those ferro-concrete buildings which are rising up all over London, he was as distinguished in his sphere as Kelstern in his. They were alike not only in the matters of brains and bad temper; but I think that their minds worked in very much the same way. At any rate both of them seemed determined not to change their ordinary course of life because of the breaking off of that engagement.

It had been the habit of both of them to have a Turkish bath, at the baths in Duke Street, at four in the afternoon on the second and last Tuesday in every month. To that habit they stuck. The fact that they must meet on those Tuesdays did not cause either of them to change his hour of taking his Turkish bath by the twenty minutes which would have given them no more than a passing glimpse of one another. They continued to take it, as they always had, simultaneously. Thick-skinned? They were thick-skinned. Neither of them pretended that he did not see the other; he scowled at him; and he scowled at him most of the time. I know this, for sometimes I had a Turkish bath myself at that hour.

It was about three months after the breaking off of the engagement that they met for the last time at that Turkish bath, and there parted for good.

Kelstern had been looking ill for about six weeks: there was a grayness and a drawn look to his face; and he was losing weight. On the second Tuesday in October he arrived at the bath punctually at four, bringing with him, as was his habit, a thermos flask full of a very delicate China tea. If he thought that he was not perspiring freely enough he would drink it in the hottest room; if he did perspire freely enough, he would drink it after his bath. Willoughton arrived about two minutes later. Kelstner fin-

ished undressing and went into the bath a couple of minutes before Willoughton. They stayed in the hot room about the same time; Kelstern went into the hottest room about a minute after Willoughton. Before he went into it he sent for his thermos flask which he had left in the dressingroom and took it into the hottest room with him.

As it happened, they were the only two people in the hottest room; and they had not been in it two minutes before the four men in the hot room heard them quarrelling. They heard Kelstern call Willoughton a dirty hound and a low blackguard, among other things, and declare he would do him in yet. Willoughton told him to go to the devil twice. Kelstern went on abusing him and presently Willoughton fairly shouted: "Oh, shut up, you old fool! Or I'll make you!"

Kelstern did not shut up. About two minutes later Willoughton came out of the hottest room, scowling, walked through the hot room into the shampooing room and put himself into the hands of one of the shampooers. Two or three minutes after that a man of the name of Helston went into the hottest room and fairly yelled. Kelstern was lying back on a blood-drenched couch, with the blood still flowing from a wound over his heart.

There was a devil of a hullabaloo. The police were called in; Willoughton was arrested. Of course he lost his temper and, protesting furiously that he had had nothing whatever to do with the crime, abused the police. That did not incline them to believe him.

After examining the room and the dead body the detective-inspector in charge of the case came to the conclusion that Kelstern had been stabbed as he was drinking his tea. The thermos flask lay on the floor in front of him and some of the tea had evidently been spilt, for some tea-leaves—the tea in the flask must have been carelessly strained off the leaves by the maid who filled it—lay on the floor about the mouth of the empty flask. It looked as if the murderer had taken advantage of Kelstern's drinking his tea to stab him while the flask rather blocked his

vision and prevented him from seeing what he would be at.

The case would have been quite plain sailing but for the fact that they could not find the weapon. It had been easy enough for Willoughton to take it into the bath in the towel in which he was draped. But how had he got rid of it? Where had he hidden it? A Turkish bath is no place to hide anything in. It is as bare as an empty barn —if anything barer; and Willoughton had been in the barest part of it. The police searched every part of it— not that there was much point in doing that, for Willoughton had come out of the hottest room, and gone through the hot room into the shampooers' room. When Helston started shouting murder, Willoughton had rushed back with the shampooers to the hottest room and there he had stayed. Since it was obvious that he had committed the murder the shampooers and the bathers had kept their eyes on him. They were all of them certain that he had not left them to go to the dressingrooms; they would not have allowed him to do so.

It was obvious that he must have carried the weapon into the bath, hidden in the folds of the towel in which he was draped, and brought it away in the folds of that towel. He had laid the towel down beside the couch on which he was being shampooed; and there it still lay when they came to look for it, untouched, with no weapon in it, with no traces of blood on it. There was not much in the fact that it was not stained with blood, since Willoughton could have wiped the knife, or dagger, or whatever weapon he used, on the couch on which Kelstern lay. There were no marks of any such wiping on the couch; but the blood, flowing from the wound, might have covered them up.

There was no finding the weapon; and its disappearance puzzled the police and later puzzled the public.

Then the doctors who made the autopsy came to the conclusion that the wound had been inflicted by a circular, pointed weapon nearly three-quarters of an inch in diameter. It had penetrated rather more than three inches

and supposing that its handle was only four inches long it must have been a sizeable weapon, quite impossible to overlook. The doctors also discovered a further proof of the theory that Kelstern had been drinking his tea when he was stabbed. Half-way down the wound they found two halves of a tea-leaf which had evidently fallen on to Kelstern's body, been driven into the wound and cut in half by the weapon. Also they discovered that Kelstern was suffering from cancer. This fact was not published in the papers; I heard it at the Devonshire.

Willoughton was brought before the magistrates and to most people's surprise did not reserve his defense. He went into the witness box and swore that he had never touched Kelstern, that he had never had anything to touch him with, that he had never taken any weapon into the Turkish bath and so had had no weapon to hide, that he had never even seen any such weapon as the doctors described. He was committed for trial.

The papers were full of the crime; every one was discussing it; and the question which occupied every one's mind was: where had Willoughton hidden the weapon? People wrote to the papers to suggest that he had ingeously put it in some place under everybody's eyes and that it had been overlooked because it was so obvious. Others suggested that, circular and pointed, it must be very like a thick lead pencil, that it was a thick lead pencil; and that was why the police had overlooked it in their search. The police had not overlooked any thick lead pencil; there had been no thick lead pencil to overlook. They hunted England through—Willoughton did a lot of motoring—to discover the man who had sold him this curious and uncommon weapon. They did not find the man who had sold it to him; they did not find a man who sold such weapons at all. They came to the conclusion that Kelstern had been murdered with a piece of a steel, or iron, rod filed to a point like a pencil.

In spite of the fact that only Willoughton *could* have murdered Kelstern, I could not believe that he had done it. The fact that Kelstern was doing his best to injure him

professionally and socially was by no means a strong enough motive. Willoughton was far too intelligent a man not to be very well aware that people do not take much notice of statements to the discredit of a man whom they need to do a job for them; and for the social injury he would care very little. Besides, he might very well injure, or even kill, a man in one of his tantrums; but his was not the kind of bad temper that plans a cold-blooded murder; and if ever a murder had been deliberately planned, Kelstern's had.

I was as close a friend as Willoughton had, and I went to visit him in prison. He seemed rather touched by my doing so, and grateful. I learnt that I was the only person who had done so. He was subdued and seemed much gentler. It might last. He discussed the murder readily enough and naturally with an harassed air. He said quite frankly that he did not expect me, in the circumstances, to believe that he had not committed it; but he had not, and he could not for the life of him conceive who had. I did believe that he had not committed it; there was something in his way of discussing it that wholly convinced me. I told him that I was quite sure that he had not killed Kelstern; and he looked at me as if he did not believe the assurance. But again he looked grateful.

Ruth was grieving for her father; but Willoughton's very dangerous plight to some degree distracted her mind from her loss. A woman can quarrel with a man bitterly without desiring to see him hanged; and Willoughton's chance of escaping hanging was not at all a good one. But she would not believe for a moment that he had murdered her father.

"No; there's nothing in it—nothing whatever," she said firmly. "If Dad had murdered Hugh I could have understood it. He had reasons—or at any rate he had persuaded himself that he had. But whatever reason had Hugh for murdering Dad? It's all nonsense to suppose that he'd mind Dad's trying all the knew to injure him, as much as that. All kinds of people are going about trying to injure other people in that way, but they don't really

injure them very much; and Hugh knows that quite well."

"Of course they don't; and Hugh wouldn't really believe that your father was injuring him much," I said. "But you're forgetting his infernal temper."

"No: I'm not," she protested. "He might kill a man in one of his rages on the spur of the moment. But this wasn't the spur of the moment. Whoever did it had worked the whole thing out and came along with the weapon ready."

I had to admit that that was reasonable enough. But who had done it? I pointed out to her that the police had made careful enquiries about every one in the bath at the time, the shampooers and the people taking their baths, but they had found no evidence whatever that any one of them had at any time had any relations, except that of shampooer, with her father.

"Either it was one of them, or somebody else who just did it and got right away, or there's a catch somewhere," she said frowning thoughtfully.

"I can't see how there can possibly have been any one in the bath, except the people who are known to have been there," said I. "In fact, there can't have been."

Then the Crown subpœnaed her as a witness for the prosecution. It seemed rather unnecessary and even a bit queer, for it could have found plenty of evidence of bad blood between the two men without dragging her into it. Plainly it was bent on doing all it knew to prove motive enough. Ruth seemed more upset by the prospect of going into the witness-box than I should have expected her to be. But then she had been having a very trying time.

On the morning of the trial I called for her after breakfast to drive her down to the New Bailey. She was pale and looked as if she had had a poor night's rest, and, naturally enough, she seemed to be suffering from an excitement she had to control. It was not like her to show any excitement she might be feeling.

We had of course been in close touch with Willoughton's solicitor, Hamley; and he had kept seats for us

just behind him. He wished to have Ruth at hand to consult should some point turn up on which she could throw light, since she knew more than any one about the relations between Willoughton and her father. I had timed our arrival very well; the jury had just been sworn in. Of course the Court was full of women, the wives of Peers and bookmakers and politicians, most of them overdressed and overscented.

Then the judge came in; and with his coming the atmosphere of the Court became charged with that sense of anxious strain peculiar to trials for murder. It was rather like the atmosphere of a sick room in a case of fatal illness, but worse.

It was unfortunate for Willoughton that the judge was Garbould. A hard-faced, common-looking fellow, and coarse in the grain, he has a well-founded reputation as a hanging judge and the habit of acting as an extra counsel for the prosecution.

Willoughton came into the box, looking under the weather and very much subdued. But he certainly looked dignified and he said that he was not guilty in a steady enough voice.

Greatorex, the leading Counsel for the Crown, opened the case for the prosecution. There was no suggestion in his speech that the Police had discovered any new fact.

Then Helston gave evidence of finding the body of the dead man and he and the other three men who had been with him in the hot room gave evidence of the quarrel they had overheard between Willoughton and the dead man, and that Willoughton came out of the hottest room, scowling and obviously furious. One of them, a fussy old gentleman of the name of Underwood, declared that it was the bitterest quarrel he had ever heard. None of the four of them could throw any light on the matter of whether Willoughton was carrying the missing weapon in the folds of the towel in which he was draped; all of them were sure that he had nothing in his hands.

The medical evidence came next. In cross-examining the doctors who had made the autopsy, Hazeldean, Wil-

loughton's counsel, established the fact quite definitely that the missing weapon was of a fair size; that its rounded blade must have been over half an inch in diameter and between three and four inches long. They were of the opinion that to drive a blade of that thickness into the heart, a handle of at least four inches in length would be necessary to give a firm enough grip. It might have been a piece of a steel, or iron, rod sharpened like a pencil. At any rate it was certainly a sizeable weapon, not one to be hidden quickly, or to disappear wholly in a Turkish bath. Hazeldean could not shake their evidence about the tea-leaf; they were confident that it had been driven into the wound and cut in half by the blade of the missing weapon, and that that went to show that the wound had been inflicted while Kelstern was drinking his tea.

Detective-Inspector Brackett, who was in charge of the case, was cross-examined at great length about his search for the missing weapon. He made it quite clear that it was nowhere in that Turkish bath, neither in the hot rooms, nor the shampooing room, nor the dressingrooms, nor the vestibule, nor the office. He had had the plunge bath emptied; he had searched the roofs, though it was practically certain that the skylight above the hot room, not the hottest, had been shut at the time of the crime. In re-examination he scouted the idea of Willoughton's having had an accomplice who had carried away the weapon for him. He had gone into that matter most carefully.

The shampooer stated that Willoughton came to him scowling so savagely that he wondered what had put him into such a bad temper. In cross-examining him Arbuthnot, Hazeldean's junior, made it clearer than ever that, unless Willoughton had already hidden the weapon in the bare hottest room, it was hidden in the towel. Then he drew from the shampooer the definite statement that Willoughton had set down the towel beside the couch on which he was shampooed, that he had hurried back to the hot rooms in front of the shampooer; that the shampooer had come back from the hot rooms, leaving Willoughton

still in them discussing the crime, to find the towel lying just as Willoughton had set it down, with no weapon in it and no trace of blood on it.

Since the Inspector had disposed of the possibility that an accomplice had slipped in, taken the weapon from the towel, and slipped out of the bath with it, this evidence really made it clear that the weapon had never left the hottest room.

Then the prosecution called evidence of the bad terms on which Kelstern and Willoughton had been. Three well-known and influential men told the jury about Kelstner's efforts to prejudice Willoughton in their eyes and the damaging statements he had made about him. One of them had felt it to be his duty to tell Willoughton about this; and Willoughton had been very angry. Arbuthnot, in cross-examining, elicited the fact that any damaging statement that Kelstern made about any one was considerably discounted by the fact that every one knew him to be in the highest degree cantankerous.

I noticed that during the end of the cross-examination of the shampooer and during this evidence, Ruth had been fidgetting and turning to look impatiently at the entrance to the Court, as if she were expecting some one. Then, just as she was summoned to the witness box, there came in a tall, stooping, grey-headed, grey-bearded man of about sixty, carrying a brown-paper parcel. His face was familiar to me; but I could not place him. He caught her eye and nodded to her. She breathed a sharp sigh of relief and bent over and handed a letter she had in her hand to Willoughton's solicitor and pointed out the grey-bearded man to him. Then she went quietly to the witness box.

Hamley read the letter and at once bent over and handed it to Hazeldean and spoke to him. I caught a note of excitement in his hushed voice. Hazeldean read the letter and appeared to grow excited too. Hamley slipped out of his seat and went to the grey-bearded man who was still standing just inside the door of the Court and began to talk to him earnestly.

Greatorex began to examine Ruth; and naturally I turned my attention to her. His examination was directed also to show on what bad terms Kelstern and Willoughton had been. Ruth was called on to tell the jury some of Kelstern's actual threats. Then—it is astonishing how few things the police fail to ferret out in a really important case—the examination took a curious turn. Greatorex began to question Ruth about her own relations with Willoughton and the plain trend of his questions was to bring out the fact that they had not merely been engaged to be married but had also been lovers.

I saw at once what the prosecution was aiming at. It was trying to make use of the tendency of a British jury and a British judge, in a natural effort to champion morality, to hang a man or a woman, who is on trial for murder, for behaving immorally in relations with the other sex. There was no better way of prejudicing Willoughton than by proving that he had seduced Ruth under the promise of marriage.

Of course Hazeldean was on his feet at once protesting that this evidence was irrelevant and inadmissible; and of course Garbould was against him—he does not enjoy the nickname by which he is known to the junior bar for nothing. Hazeldean was magnificent. He had one of the worst rows with Garbould he had ever had; and he has had many. Garbould is a fool to let him have these rows. Hazeldean always gets the better of him, or seems to; and it does him good with the jury. But then Garbould was raised to the bench not for intelligence but for political merit. He ruled that the questions were admissible and put one or two to Ruth himself.

Then Willoughton lost his temper and protested that this had nothing to do with the case and that it was an outrage. Willoughton has a ringing voice of considerable volume. He is not at all an easy man to hush when he does not wish to hush; and they were sometime hushing him. By the time they succeeded Garbould was purplish-red with fury. Anything that he could do to hang Willoughton would certainly be done. But, observing the

jury, my impression was that Willoughton's outburst had done him good with it and that Hazeldean's protests had shaken its confidence in Garbould. When I looked at the faces, just a trifle sickly, of the counsel for the prosecution, I felt sure that the Crown had bungled this business rather badly.

Greatorex, assisted by Garbould, went on with his questions; and Ruth defiant rather than abashed, and looking in her flushed animation a more charming creature than ever, admitted that she and Willoughton had been lovers; that more than once when he had brought her home from a dance or a theatre he had not left her till the early morning. One of the maids had spied on them; and the Crown had the facts.

I was afraid, in spite of Hazeldean's protests, that the fact that Willoughton had seduced her under the promise of marriage, as Greatorex put it, would do him great harm with the jury—very likely it would hang him.

Then Ruth, still flushed, but not greatly discomposed, said: "That would be a reason for my father's murdering Mr. Willoughton, not for Mr. Willoughton's murdering my father."

That brought Garbould down upon her like a ton of bricks. She was there to answer questions, not to make idle remarks and so forth and so on.

Then Greatorex came to the breaking off of the engagement and put it to her that Willoughton had broken it off, had in fact jilted her after compromising her. That she would not have for a moment. She declared that they had had a quarrel and she had broken it off. To that she stuck and there was no shaking her, though Garbould himself took a hearty hand in trying to shake her.

In the middle of it Willoughton, who was looking quite himself again, now that the atmosphere of the Court might be said to be charged almost with violence, said in a very unpleasant, jeering voice: "What she says is perfectly true—what's the good of bothering her?"

Again Garbould was to the fore, and angrily reprimanded him for speaking, bade him keep silent, and said

that he would not have his Court turned into a bear-garden.

"With the bear on the bench," said Hazeldean to Arbuthnot in a whisper that carried well.

Two or three people laughed. One of them was a juryman. By the time Garbould had finished with him I did not think that that juryman would have convicted Willoughton, if he had actually seen him stab Kelstern.

Willoughton was writing a note which was passed to Hazeldean.

Hazeldean rose to cross-examine Ruth with a wholly confident air. He drew from her the facts that her father had been on excellent terms with Willoughton until the breaking off of the engagement; that in that matter he had taken her part warmly; and that when the maid who had spied upon them had informed him of her relations with Willoughton he had been very little more enraged than he was already.

Then Hazeldean asked: "Is it a fact that since the breaking off of your engagement the prisoner has more than once begged you to forgive him and renew it?"

"Four times," said Ruth.

"And you refused?"

"Yes," said Ruth. She looked at Willoughton queerly and added: "He wanted a lesson."

"Did he then beg you at least to go through the form of marriage with him, and promise to leave you at the church door?"

"Yes."

"And you refused?"

"Yes," said Ruth.

Garbould bent forward and said in his most unpleasant tone: "And why did you reject the opportunity of repairing your shameful behaviour?"

"It wasn't shameful," Ruth almost snapped; and she scowled at him frankly. Then she added naïvely: "I refused because there was no hurry. He would always marry me if I changed my mind and wanted to."

There was a pause. To me it seemed clearer than ever

that the Crown had bungled badly in raising the question of the relations between her and Willoughton since he had evidently been more than ready to save her from any harm that might come of their indiscretion. But then, with a jury, you can never tell. Then Hazeldean started on a fresh line.

In sympathetic accents he asked: "Is it a fact that your father was suffering from cancer in a painful form?"

"It was beginning to grow very painful," said Ruth sadly.

"Did he make a will and put all his affairs in order a few days before he died?"

"Three days," said Ruth.

"Did he ever express an intention of committing suicide?"

"He said that he would stick it out for a little while and then end it all," said Ruth. She paused and added: *"And that is what he did do."*

One might almost say that the Court started. I think that everyone in it moved a little, so that there was a kind of rustling murmur. Garbould threw himself back in his seat with a snort of incredulity and glowered at Ruth.

"Will you tell the Court your reasons for that statement?" said Hazeldean.

Ruth seemed to pull herself together; the flush had faded from her face and she was looking very tired; then she began in a quiet, even voice: "I never believed for a moment that Mr. Willoughton murdered my father. If my father had murdered Mr. Willoughton it would have been a different matter."

Garbould leaned forward and snarled that it was not her beliefs or fancies that were wanted, but facts.

I did not think that she heard him; she was concentrating on giving her reasons exactly; she went on in the same quiet tone: "Of course, like everybody else I puzzled over the weapon: what it was and where it had got to. I did not believe that it was a pointed piece of a half-inch steel rod. If anybody had come to the Turkish bath meaning to murder my father and hide the weapon, they

wouldn't have used one so big and so difficult to hide, when a hat-pin would have done just as well and could be hidden much more easily. But what puzzled me most was the tea-leaf in the wound. All the other tea-leaves that came out of the flask were lying on the floor. Inspector Brackett told me they were. And I couldn't believe that one tea-leaf had fallen on to my father at the very place above his heart at which the point of the weapon had penetrated the skin and got driven in by it. It was too much of a coincidence for me to swallow. But I got no nearer understanding it than anyone else."

Garbould broke in in a tone of some exasperation and told her to come to the facts. Hazeldean rose and protested that the witness should not be interrupted; that she had solved a mystery which had puzzled some of the best brains in England, and she should be allowed to tell her story in her own way.

Again Ruth did not appear to listen to them, and when they stopped she went on in the same quiet voice: "Of course I remembered that Dad had talked to putting an end to it; but no one with a wound like that could get up and hide the weapon. Then, the night before last I dreamt that I went into the laboratory and saw a piece of steel rod, pointed, lying on the table at which my father used to work."

"Dreams now!" murmured Garbould contemptuously; and he leaned back and folded his hands over his stomach.

"I didn't think much of the dream, of course," Ruth went on. "I had been puzzling about it all so hard for so long that it was only natural to dream about it. But after breakfast I had a sudden feeling that the secret was in the laboratory if I could only find it. I did not attach any importance to the feeling; but it went on growing stronger; and after lunch I went to the laboratory and began to hunt.

"I looked through all the drawers and could find nothing. Then I went round the room looking at everything and into everything, instruments and retorts and tubes and so on. Then I went into the middle of the floor and looked

slowly round the room pretty hard. Against the wall, near the door, lying ready to be taken away, was a gas cylinder. I rolled it over to see what gas had been in it and found no label on it."

She paused to look round the Court as if claiming its best attention; then she went on: "Now that was very queer because every gas cylinder must have a label on it —so many gases are dangerous. I turned on the cylinder and nothing came out of it. It was quite empty. Then I went to the book in which all the things which come in are entered, and found that ten days before Dad died he had had in a cylinder of CO_2 and seven pounds of ice. Also he had had seven pounds of ice every day till the day of his death. It was the ice and the CO_2 together that gave me the idea. CO_2, carbon dioxide, has a very low freezing-point—eighty degrees centigrade—and as it comes out of the cylinder and mixes with the air it turns into very fine snow; and that snow, if you compress it, makes the hardest and toughest ice possible. It flashed on me that Dad could have collected this snow and forced it into a mould and made a weapon that would not only inflict that wound but would *disappear instantly!*"

She paused again to look round the Court at about as rapt a lot of faces as any narrator could desire. Then she went on: "I knew that that was what he had done. I knew it for certain. Carbon dioxide ice would make a hard, tough dagger, and it would melt quickly in the hottest room of a Turkish bath and leave no smell because it is scentless. So there wouldn't be any weapon. And it explained the tea-leaf too. Dad had made a carbon dioxide dagger perhaps a week before he used it, perhaps only a day. And he had put it into the thermos flask as soon as he had made it. The thermos flask keeps out the heat as well as the cold, you know. But to make sure that it couldn't melt at all he kept the flask in ice till he was ready to use the dagger. It's the only way you can explain that tea-leaf. It came out of the flask sticking to the point of the dagger and was driven into the wound!"

She paused again and one might almost say that the Court heaved a deep sigh of relief.

Then Garbould asked in an unpleasant and incredulous voice: "Why didn't you take this fantastic theory straight to the police?"

"But that wouldn't have been any good," she protested quickly. "It was no use my knowing it myself; I had to make other people believe it; I had to find evidence. I began to hunt for it. I felt in my bones that there was some. What I wanted was the mould. I found it!"

She uttered the words in a tone of triumph and smiled at Willoughton; then she went on: "At least I found bits of it. In the box into which we used to throw odds and ends, scraps of material, damaged instruments, and broken test tubes, I found some pieces of vulcanite; and I saw at once that they were bits of a vulcanite container. I took some wax and rolled it into a rod about the right size and then I pieced the container together on the outside of it—at least most of it—there are some small pieces missing. It took me nearly all night. But I found the most important bit—*the pointed end!*"

She dipped her hand into her handbag and drew out a black object about nine inches long and three quarters of an inch thick and held it up for every one to see.

Someone, without thinking, began to clap; and there came a storm of applause that drowned the voice of the Clerk calling for order and the bellowing of Garbould.

When the applause died down, Hazeldean, who never misses the right moment, said: " I have no more questions to ask the witness, my lord," and sat down.

That action seemed to clinch it in my eyes, and I have no doubt, it clinched it in the eyes of the jury.

The purple Garbould leant forward and almost bellowed at Ruth: "Do you expect the jury to believe that a well-known man like your father died in the act of deliberately setting a dastardly trap to hang the prisoner?"

Ruth looked at him, shrugged her shoulders, and said with a calm acceptance of the facts of human nature one would expect to find only in a much older woman: "Oh,

well, Daddy was like that. And he certainly believed he had very good reasons for killing Mr. Willoughton."

There was that in her tone and manner which made it absolutely certain that Kelstern was not only like that but that he had acted according to his nature.

Greatorex did not re-examine Ruth; he conferred with Hazeldean. Then Hazeldean rose to open the case for the defence. He said that he would not waste the time of the Court, and that in view of the fact that Miss Kelstern had solved the problem of her father's death, he would only call one witness, Professor Mozley.

The grey-headed, grey-bearded, stooping man, who had come to the Court so late, went into the witness-box. Of course his face had been familiar to me; I had seen his portrait in the newspapers a dozen times. He still carried the brown-paper parcel.

In answer to Hazeldean's questions he stated that it was possible, not even difficult, to make a weapon of carbon dioxide hard enough and tough enough and sharp enough to inflict such a wound as that which had caused Kelstern's death. The method of making it was to fold a piece of chamois leather into a bag, hold that bag with the left hand, protected by a glove, over the nozzle of a cylinder containing liquid carbon dioxide, and open the valve with the right hand. Carbon dioxide evaporates so quickly that its freezing-point, 80° centigrade, is soon reached; and it solidifies in the chamois-leather bag as a deposit of carbon dioxide snow. Then turn off the gas, spoon that snow into a vulcanite container of the required thickness, and ram it down with a vulcanite plunger into a rod of the required hardness. He added that it was advisable to pack the container in ice while filling it and ramming down the snow, then put the rod into a thermos flask; and keep it till it is needed.

"And you have made such a rod?" said Hazeldean.

"Yes," said the Professor, cutting the string of the brown-paper parcel. "When Miss Kelstern hauled me out of bed at half-past seven this morning to tell me her discoveries, I perceived at once that she had found the solu-

tion of the problem of her father's death, which had puzzled me considerably. I had breakfast quickly and got to work to make such a weapon myself for the satisfaction of the Court. Here it is."

He drew a thermos flask from the brown paper, unscrew the top of it, and inverted it. There dropped into his gloved hand a white rod about eight inches long. He held it out for the jury to see.

"This carbon dioxide ice is the hardest and toughest ice we know of; and I have no doubt that Mr. Kelstern killed himself with a similar rod. The difference between the rod he used and this is that his rod was pointed. I had no pointed vulcanite container; but the container that Miss Kelstern pieced together is pointed. Doubtless Mr. Kelstern had it specially made, probably by Messrs. Hawkins & Spender."

He dropped the rod back into the thermos flask and screwed on the top.

Hazeldean sat down. The juryman who had been reprimanded by Garbould leaned forward and spoke earnestly to the foreman. Greatroxe rose.

"With regard to the point of the rod, Professor Mozley: would it remain sharp long enough to pierce the skin in that heat?" he asked.

"In my opinion it would," said the Professor. "I have been considering that point and bearing in mind the facts that Mr. Kelstern would from his avocation be very deft with his hands, and being a scientific man, would know exactly what to do, he would have the rod out of the flask and the point in position in very little more than a second—perhaps less. He would, I think, hold it in his left hand and drive it home by striking the butt of it hard with his right. The whole thing would not take him two seconds. Besides, if the point of the weapon had melted the tea-leaf would have fallen off it."

"Thank you," said Greatorex, and turned and conferred with the Crown solicitors.

Then he said: "We do not propose to proceed with the case, my lord."

The foreman of the jury rose quickly and said: "And the Jury doesn't want to hear anything more, my lord. We're quite satisfied that the prisoner isn't guilty."

Garbould hesitated. For two pins he would have directed the case to proceed. Then his eye fell on Hazeldean, who was watching him; I fancied that he decided not to give him a chance of saying more disagreeable things.

Looking black enough, he put the question formally to the Jury, who returned a verdict of "Not Guilty," and then he discharged Willoughton.

I came out of the Court with Ruth, and we waited for Willoughton.

Presently he came out of the door and stopped and shook himself. Then he saw Ruth and came to her. They did not greet one another. She just slipped her hand through his arm; and they walked out of the New Bailey together.

We made a good deal of noise, cheering them.

HARRY STEPHEN KEELER

THE SERVICES OF AN EXPERT

It was close upon midnight.

I had just placed my silk hat on the rack that hung at the side of the room when I heard the slight sounds coming from the direction of the fire escape. Then I detected the shadow on the window pane.

I paused in the act of removing my gloves and felt quickly for my back pocket. My revolver was there.

So I stood very quietly in the darkness and watched the man on the iron framework outside as he fumbled a moment and then raised the window. Since a small patch of moonlight, now outlined on the rug, acted as a weak source of illumination, I drew further back in the shadow of the door.

After thrusting one leg over the sill, the intruder drew in the rest of his body. For an instant he stood, glancing with uncertainty at the raised window back of him.

Then it was that I slid my right hand carefully along the wall until my fingers came in contact with the electric light switch. With my left I drew out the small, nickel-plated revolver that I have always with me for cases of emergency.

"Hands up!" I said calmly—and snapped on the incandescents.

He thrust his hands instantly above his head and stood blinking in the sudden flood of light. I had opportunity then, for the first time, to survey him from head to foot.

He was a small and rather stockily-built individual, clad in a checkered suit; his face could be aptly described by the phrase "roly-poly." On his head reposed a derby hat and, dropping from his collar, was a gorgeously red tie

(Copyright by Harry Stephen Keeler. Dramatic rights reserved.)

that lent the final touch to his general appearance of flashiness.

"Well," I remarked, advancing toward him with weapon still extended, "what's your game, my man?"

He seemed to be yet dazed by the sudden turn of affairs for him. After a pause, he spoke.

"My game? Well—to tell you the truth—I don't just know. A minute ago I was sliding in that window back of me . . . and now . . . I seem to be . . . well . . . just waiting . . . for something to happen."

"Don't worry," I answered grimly, "It'll happen." I stepped toward the 'phone that stood on the table, watching him all the while. He didn't blink an eye. So I stopped.

"I suppose you're one of these fly-by-night birds known as second-story men, eh?" My voice took on a more sarcastic tone. "Or perhaps you're only walking in your sleep now. In a short while you'll wake up and declare it's some terrible mistake. Or possibly you've stumbled into the wrong house by error?"

His upraised arms were losing their rigidity. To satisfy myself as to whether he was armed, I stepped over to him and inserted my hand into each one of his pockets in turn. He had no weapons, however.

"All right," I said. "Let 'em down." I went over to the window, closed it, and drew down the shade. Then I returned to the table and dropped into the swivel chair, beckoning him at the same time into the straight-backed chair that stood directly across. "Sit down," I commanded. "Before I turn you over to the police I'll have a little talk with you. Do you know where you are? Do you know whose apartment you're in?"

"Well," he replied, "the name on the doorbell downstairs says Mr. Peter J. Dawson."

Probably I was goading him with my remarks far more than was necessary as I answered:

"You're quite observing, I'm sure, I presume then, that since the doings of successful private criminal investigators and their families are of such interest to our news-

papers, you were merely one of many who happened to read in the Chicago Despatch that Mrs. Dawson left yesterday for Atlantic City, and that her illustrious husband, solver of the famous Wrangley counterfeiting case, the Abe Shaffner bond theft, the Cissy Rogers murder, and other bizarre little puzzles forming part of our social fabric, was to leave the city this morning to direct the work on the Clyley kidnapping case at Cincinnati. Put a little too much faith in newspaper data this time, though, didn't you? How could you be certain, for instance, that Millionaire Clyley didn't alter his plans the last moment about whom he'd employ to help him find his missing daughter? What could you know of telegrams that might have passed since that news story was published?" I paused. "Such nice plans as you have, too. Of course you made sure, by telephoning first, that the servant was away too—Heaven knows where?"

He bit out his reply in short, angry words. "Say! If you're going to turn me over, hurry up and do it. I'm not going to sit here and listen to all your gaff."

"Here, here," I said, "don't get huffy, my good sir. Even though I represent a phase of society that's not at all liked by your ilk, I can still be a very good fellow—a very good fellow at times—in fact, this is the one time of your life that you want to cultivate my friendship, of all persons." I watched him narrowly. Then I continued quizzing him.

"Confess, though, now . . . you just strolled in, as it were, to see whether any of the famous Dawson diamonds, achieved as rewards for an honorable career of hunting thieves much bigger than yourself, were lying around loose? They were most accurately described, I believe, in the newspaper account of the big dinner party last week, weren't they? How about it?"

His answer was non-committal, to say the least.

"I'm not confessing anything of the sort. Ring up the cops and be done with it." He laughed an odd little laugh. "All the good cells 'll be filled up with drunks in another hour. It's midnight now."

The more I thought of our unusual situation the more I felt that this man could possibly prove very valuable to me. My questioning now took on a definite trend.

"What's your particular specialty, if I may make so bold as to inquire? My experience, I'll confess, has been with a higher order of criminals than yourself. It seems really a rare treat to talk with a real second-story man; or are you perhaps a porch climber? or a lock-picker? or a stick-up man? or maybe even a safe-blower?

"For example," I went on, "assuming that the jewelry you're looking for is over there in that iron box," and I pointed toward the massive safe that stood in the corner of the room, "just what, may I ask, was your method of procedure to be?"

"For the last time," he said wearily, "I'm telling you I'm not talking."

I was quite determined, though, to continue along the line on which I had already started.

"Ah, yes!" I remarked soothingly, "but you must talk. I feel a rather charitable impulse running through my veins this evening—an impulse that prompts me to be a trifle lenient with you. What do you know about safes?"

For the first time he betrayed a little interest.

"Oh, I know a little about 'em," he replied. "For instance—that one—over there—" He motioned toward the corner of the room. "I could tell you a few things about it—just from where I sit. That's one of the earlier ones put out by the International Burglar-proof Safe and Lock Company of Utica, New York. That's their type—" He wrinkled his brow and pondered a moment. ". . . 36 B."

Things were shaping up better than I had expected. My voice must have shown the satisfaction I felt. "Good. You are quite an educated fellow in your line. Now that safe belongs to my wife. Not a soul knows the combination of it but herself. I frankly confess I don't. Is a safe like that really burglar-proof? Could you open it, all alone, unaided?"

He crossed his legs. "I daresay I could," he returned, gazing at me through eyes that had become mere slits.

"For you see it happens to be all in the way you spin your dial around and listen for the tumblers dropping into place." He inserted his thumbs jauntily in his armholes and commenced to whistle a gay little tune. "But I don't intend to try," he added.

Obviously, this was the man I required. I dropped my tone of banter and spoke seriously.

"Now—as a sporting proposition—and because I've never seen such a person as yourself actually work in front of my eyes—if you could demonstrate your ability by opening yon strongbox in—say—five minutes—not a second more, you understand—I'd be careless enough to shut my eyes and let you walk out of here through the same fire escape window you came in."

Exultantly, he rose to his feet. "Say—are you dead in earnest? Are you on the square about that proposition? D'you mean it? Will you let me walk out o' here if I can jiggle that combination open?"

"Certainly," I assured him. "Of course I mean it. Can you do it?"

"I can make a try of it," he said, walking toward the safe. Then he glanced over it.

The silence was suddenly broken by the sharp ringing of the telephone bell which stood on the library table at the side of the room.

I ignored it.

Then it rang a second time.

The little man returned to the table and stood waiting, with his hands in his pockets.

"Going t' answer?" he inquired.

"Let it ring," I replied curtly.

He watched me closely, his face breaking slowly into a grin. Then he levelled his forefinger directly at me and launched forth into a scathing speech.

"Huh!" he exclaimed. "I'm a little next to you now. You're afraid to answer that phone. May I ask just why you don't want anybody t' know you were home in your apartment t'night—on the night of June the twenty-fifth—while the lady o' th' house is in the East—while you're

supposed to be on a train going to a big case in Cincinnati? Eh? What's coming off here t'night? What's your game—Mr.—Mr.—Dawson?" At this point he evidently ran out of either breath or denunciatory ideas.

That cursed phone then rang for the third time. I was not only quite flustered now—but angry as well. "That's enough from you," I growled.

His accusing forefinger was still pointed at me as the phone bell rang for the fourth—and what proved to be—the last time. He must have taken great delight in making me squirm, for he started off again.

"You're got something shady scheduled here for t'night. I always knew the police were as crooked as the crooks. You don't *dare* answer that phone. When you get ready t' let me into your little game, then maybe I'll do your dirty work. Not until." He sank into the straight-backed chair and stared at the window in back of me.

I glanced cautiously behind me, realizing that this rascal was perhaps playing for time. A suspicion crossed my mind that possibly a confederate was posted near the grounds. But we were quite alone. For about a minute I thought on the matter. This man had arrived at a crucial moment for me. Without doubt, it seemed best that I render a detailed explanation to him if I wished to placate him—especially in view of the fact that the telephone had complicated matters as it had. So I leaned back in my chair and began, picking my words with care.

"I'm going to let you in on a family secret now. Of course, I'm quite safe—and, likewise, I don't have to do it. If I wish, I can turn you over any minute and the little tale you might tell I could brand as a lie, pure and simple. But in some respects you're a valuable man to me tonight. You can do me a big service. In return, I do you the bigger service—of saving you from five or ten years in the Joliet Penitentiary.

"Now pay attention," I commanded. "I'm looking for something in my wife's safe. No, not specifically her diamonds—except in a certain sense. It's a packet of letters—

a packet that means more to me than the diamonds themselves. And I've got to get that packet.

"No doubt," I went on, "you've often read in the newspapers of some of the rich rewards I've received in the bigger cases I've worked successfully on. And I've been like a gambler, for when rewards were big, I've salted most of 'em away in diamonds. I made one fatal mistake, though: I gave all of mine, as fast as I accumulated them, to my wife. It's all she cares for—all she could ever see."

He was paying strict attention to my words; so I continued, punctuating my remarks with emphatic gestures of my clenched fists.

"That is, my friend, it's all she could ever see till—till these last few months—till she met this parlor lizard that she's fallen for. Oh yes, she's had an affair. She's received letters, and she's written them too; and the ones that she's written which have come back to her because of his being eternally on the move, she's faithfully put away in that private safe of hers till she could give 'em into his own dear hands. Fool that she was, to think she could carry on an affair under the very nose of a criminal investigator" I paused. "Well, to chop the story short, she's got my fortune—a hundred thousand dollars' worth in rings and geegaws—all hoarded up in that safe of hers like a miser. Sticking tighter to 'em than a barnacle sticks to the bottom of a mud scow.

"And I—well, I'm just a sucker—the benighted husband. Minus his fortune, minus the evidence to get a divorce with—for she's got to give me my freedom. I can stand most anything but this—being made a laughing-stock of. I've still a chance to make a happy play for life with some good, right sort of girl.

"She—my wife—left this morning for a trip to Atlantic City. That part of the statement in the Chicago Despatch was quite true. She doesn't dream that I even suspect. The servant went to visit a sick sister. And I—well, I'm on a train bound for Cincinnati to go to work on the Clyley kidnapping case . . . not! . . . are you wise now?

Millionaire Clyley—my old friend—is simply helping me out a bit, that's all.

"Instead, I'm back here in the apartment tonight, reconnoitering—looking over the land—figuring out whether I could procure tools from some of the joints I know in the underworld, come back tomorrow night, and drill, saw, hack, punch or chisel my way into that strong-box and get that evidence that will give me my freedom—and those diamonds that belong to me—not to her. Oh, I'll take care of her all right. I'll be fair with her. I'll give her some sort of alimony. But I've got to protect myself." I paused. "That's the situation, my friend. And along comes yourself—an expert in your line. Do you see now what I need you for? Can you help me out? If you can, you're a free man." I leaned back and mopped my forehead. I had talked for five straight minutes.

If I had expected sympathy, however, I failed woefully in my expectations. He was coldly calculating—nothing more.

"You got some jane on the string that you want to marry, haven't you?" he said caustically.

"No jane," I returned.

"I doubt it," he said. He paused thinking. "Now I'm talking business," he added. "What's there in all this for me?"

So far as I could see, there was no necessity for me to dicker with this fellow, since it was quite evident that I had the upper hand. So my reply was short and to the point.

"Not a red cent."

He seemed still inclined to argue. "Pretty hard bargain, I call it."

I was becoming impatient. The unpleasant thought of a possible confederate, in the hope of whose assistance he was delaying matters, again entered my mind. "To my way of thinking," I remarked, "it's a pretty easy bargain."

"Well," he returned, "what guarantee have I got that you'll let me go if I do the job—that is—if I can?"

Really, the man's stubbornness was aggravating. "Num-

skull," I said, restraining myself with difficulty from shouting at him, "—if I can get at that property, which all came from my own pockets in the first place, it's to my decided advantage that you, the mysterious burglar, get away. I'll account for my possession of the divorce evidence by saying I bought it outright from the man who brought it to me. As for you, it's to your undeniable benefit to keep a quiet tongue in your head afterward. Then, too, haven't you my promise—my word of honor?"

He did not lose the opportunity to deliver a thrust.

"A lot o' faith," he jeered, "I'd put in the word of honor of a guy that'd steal from his own wife, so's to marry some jane he's struck on. I don't believe that story about Mrs. Dawson and this parlor lizard. You're making that up. Say," he finished with a leer, "aren't you yourself the Gay Lothario in this case? And aren't you one of those things called Indian-Givers?"

This was going just a little too far, I decided. I was commencing to feel decidedly wrathful, so I determined to use up no more valuable time discussing the offer. "We're wasting precious moments," I said sharply. "What do you intend to do? Is it this—or the police?"

Evidently he realized that he was hardly in a position to do otherwise than comply with my wishes.

"I'll make the best of it," was his reply. "My copper friend—you're a mighty hard man to deal with—and if anything goes wrong—don't blame it on anybody but yourself." He paused. "Well—here's where I get down to work. I never use tools. Too crude."

He removed his coat.

I watched him with interest, wondering how on earth he could open a supposedly burglar-proof safe without an instrument of any kind. I had heard of his kind, but never so far as I could remember had I met up with an authentic case of a "tumbler-feeler." He seemed, however, quite self-confident.

He folded up his coat and deposited it on the chair which he had occupied. Then he unfastened each cuff and turned it back, clear to the elbow. He glanced at me.

"Say, friend," he queried, "if I can do it, don't I get one little jewel for myself—say a little half-carat ring?"

Seeing the preparations he had already gone to, I had not been inclined to yield jot nor tittle. His persistency, though, had exhausted my patience.

I plunged my hand into my pocket and brought forth the only bill that there was on my person—a crisp, yellow fifty—which I flung on the table without a word. He seized it cheerfully and tucked it in his vest-pocket.

After all—what did a mere $50 matter? The difference between his remuneration and mine was too great.

He walked slowly over to the safe and rapped on its sides and top with his knuckles. Then, with great mysteriousness, he wet the tips of his fingers, one at a time, on his tongue, and wiped them on his rolled up sleeves.

He stooped over.

Then he went through a series of puzzling actions. At times he spun the dial. At other times he worked it slowly, pressing his ear close to the iron door, and listening with a far-away look on his face. Occasionally he glanced in my direction out of the corner of his eye.

For nearly a minute I watched him. Then since it was summer time and the room had begun to feel stifling, I stepped casually over to the window, raised the shade, and opened it to its full extent, letting in a refreshing breeze from Lake Michigan.

This accomplished, I turned around to see how my expert was coming along with his task.

Great Cæsar's Horn Spoon!—

While my back was turned he had quietly succeeded in swinging open the door of the safe and had extracted therefrom a huge blue-steel revolver which, in less than a second, he had raised, pointed in my direction, and fired with a thundering report great enough to wake twenty neighborhoods.

I dropped flat to the floor and lay still as a log.

Hurt? Not a bit of it! He probably missed me by a mile—but I was taking no chances of receiving another broadside from that villainous-looking weapon. While I lay

prone, never moving, he stood stock still for a quarter of a minute. Then, with four giant strides, he cleared half the room and landed in the swivel chair with his back to me.

Cautiously, I raised my head. Silently, I regained my knees and feet. I tiptoed backward a step to the window and out on the fire escape, where I crouched down, watching the little man in the swivel chair.

Excitedly, he was jerking the receiver hook of the phone up and down. Finally he must have roused Central, for I heard him say: "H'llo—h'llo—'lo—North Shore Police Station, please——"

After the lapse of a few second he must have obtained his connection for he shouted into the transmitter:

"Station? Police station? North Shore? All right. Shoot an ambulance or a doctor and a squad in a red-hot hurry to 725 Franklin Road—the second apartment—the Dawson's apartment. I've wounded 'r killed a man. Killed him, I guess. Nope, don't know him—was on my way to Cincinnati and saw the headlines in the late papers announcing the Clyley girl had been found—so came back on home—had lost my latchkey—came up by firescape—found him here—yes! yes! yes!—oh hello, Cap, sure—this is Dawson himself speaking—sure—yes, Peter J. Dawson——"

I had heard enough. I slid silently down the iron fire-escape ladder and hastened forth into the night, my last two dimes jingling as I ran.

MRS. BELLOC LOWNDES

POPEAU INTERVENES

I

"THIS is dear, delightful Paris! Paris, which I love; Paris, where I have always been so happy with Bob. It's foolish of me to feel depressed—I've nothing to be depressed about——"

Little Lady Waverton could hear her voiceless thoughts as she walked through the vast grey Gare du Nord on this hot, airless July night. She formed one of a party of three: the other two being her husband, Lord Waverton, and the beautiful Russian *émigrée,* Countess Filenska. The three friends had suddenly determined to take a little jaunt to Paris "on the cheap," without maids or valets. It had really been the Countess's idea. She had drawn a delightful picture of an old hostelry on the left bank of the Seine called the Hotel Paragon.

Perhaps the journey had tired the charming, over-refined, delicate woman her friends called Gracie Waverton. Yet this morning she had felt as well and happy as she ever did feel, for she was not a strong woman, and for some time past she had felt that she and her Bob, whom in her quiet, reserved way she loved deeply, were drifting apart. Like all very rich men, Lord Waverton had a dozen ways of killing time in which his wife could play no part. Still, according to modern ideas they were a happy couple.

It did not take long for the autobus to glide across Paris at this time of night, and when they did turn into the quiet *cul de sac,* across the end of which was the superb eighteenth-century mansion which had been the

(Copyright, 1926, by Marie Belloc Lowndes.)

town palace of the Dukes of Paragon, Lady Waverton lost her vague feeling of despondency. There was something so cheery, as well as truly welcoming, about mine host and his wife. She was enchanted, too, with the high-ceilinged, panelled rooms, which had been reserved for their party, and which overlooked a lovely garden.

II

"Robert! It is *too* exquisite! You are the most generous man in the world!"

Olga Filenska was gazing at an open white velvet-lined jewel-case containing a superb emerald pendant.

"I'm glad you like it, darling——" Lord Waverton seized her hand and made her put what it contained on the table near which they both stood. Then he clasped her in his arms, and their lips met and clung together.

The secret lovers were standing in the centre of the large, barely-furnished *salon* which belonged to the private suite, and they felt secure from sudden surprise by the high screen which masked the door.

At last he released her, and then he moodily exclaimed: "Why did you make me bring my wife? It spoils everything, and makes me feel such a cad!"

"Remember my reputation. It is all I have left of my vanished treasures!"

He caught her to him again, and once more kissed her long and thirstily. "Oh, how I love you!" he said in a strangled whisper. "There's nothing, nothing, *nothing* I wouldn't do to have you for ever as my own!"

"Is that true?" she asked, with a searching look.

"Haven't I offered to give up everything, and make a bolt? It's you who refuse!"

"Your wife," she murmured, in a low, bitter tone, "would never divorce you. She thinks it wicked."

"If I'm willing to give up my country, and everything I care for, for love of you, why shouldn't you do as much for me?"

But to that she made no answer.

What would they both have felt had it suddenly been revealed to them that their every word had been overheard, each passionate gesture witnessed, by an invisible listener and watcher? Yet such was the strange and almost incredible fact. Hercules Popeau, but lately retired on a pension from the C.I.D. branch of the French Police, had long made the Hotel Paragon his home, and his comfortable study lay to the right of the stately drawing-room which terminated Lord and Lady Waverton's suite.

He had lived in the old house for quite a long time before he had discovered—with annoyance rather than satisfaction—that just behind the arm-chair in which he usually sat, and cleverly concealed in the wainscoting, was a slanting sliding panel which enabled him both to hear and to see everything that went on in the next room. This sinister "Judas," as it was well called, dated from the eighteenth century, when a diseased inquisitiveness was the outstanding peculiarity of both the great and the humble, even the King spending his leisure in reading copies of the love-letters, intercepted in the post, of those of his faithful subjects who were known to him.

Hercules Popeau had been closely connected with the British Army during the great war, and he remembered that Lord Waverton had performed an act of signal valour at Beaumont Hamel. That fact had so far interested him in the three tourists as to have caused him to watch the party while they were at dinner the evening following their arrival in Paris. Popeau was very human, and he had taken a liking to fragile-looking Lady Waverton, and a dislike to her lovely friend. The scene he had just witnessed confirmed his judgment of the Countess.

"I wish Gracie were not here!" exclaimed Lord Waverton.

"She is—how you call it?—too much thinking of herself to think of us," was the confident answer.

There came a look of discomfort and shame over his face. "You women are such damn good actresses! Then you think she's really ill this morning?"

"Ill is a big word. Still she is willing to see a doctor.

It is fortunate that I know a very good Paris physician. He will be here very soon. But she wants us to start for Versailles now, even before he comes."

"All right, I'll go and get ready."

When she believed herself alone, Countess Filenska walked across to the long mirror between the two windows and stood looking at herself there, in the bright light, dispassionately.

Hercules Popeau gazed at her, absorbed. What a beautiful woman! While very dark, she had no touch of swarthiness. Her oval face, indeed, had the luminosity of a white petal. She had had the courage to remain unshingled, and the Frenchman, faithful to far-away memories of youth, visioned the glorious mantle her tightly-coiled hair must form when unbound. Her figure, at once slender and rounded, was completely revealed, as is the fashion to-day, by her plain black dress. A Russian? Hercules Popeau shook his head. Her southern type of beauty was unmistakable. He had known an Athenian woman very like this Countess Filenska.

It had been the hidden watcher's lifelong business to guess the innermost thoughts of men and women. But he felt he had no clue as to what was making this beautiful "dark lady" smile in so inscrutable a way to herself.

At last she turned round and left the room, and at once her unseen admirer, and, yes, judge, closed the tiny slit in the panelled wall. What a curious, romantic, and, yes, sinister page he had just turned in the great Book of Life! A page of a not uncommon story; that of a beautiful, unscrupulous woman playing the part of serpent in a modern Garden of Eden.

It was clear that Lord Waverton was infatuated with this lovely creature, but there had been no touch of genuine passion in her voice, or even in her apparently eager response to his ardour.

Hercules Popeau had a copy of the latest "Who's Who?" on his writing-table. Eagerly he opened the section containing the letter W. Yes, here was the entry:

"Waverton, Robert Hinchfield, of Liddersfield, York. Second Baron."

And then there came back to him the knowledge that this man's father had been one of the greatest of Victorian millionaires. No wonder he had been able to present the woman he loved in secret with that magnificent jewel!

There came the sounds of a motor drawing up under the huge *porte-cochère*. Rising, the Frenchman went quickly over to the open window on his right.

Yes, there was a big car, the best money could hire, with his lordship standing by the bonnet. He looked the ideal Milord of French fancy, being a tall, broad man with fair hair, having in it a touch of red. He was obviously impatient and ill at ease. But he had not long to wait. The Countess stepped out into the courtyard. Even in her close motor bonnet she looked entrancingly lovely.

Popeau took a step backward as there floated up the voices of the two people whose secret he now shared.

"Did you see Gracie?" asked Lord Waverton, abruptly.

"Yes, and she was so sweet and kind! She begs us not to hurry back. She is quite looking forward to the visit of my old friend, Dr. Scorpion."

Scorpion? A curious name—not a happy name—for a medical man. Hercules Popeau had once known a doctor of the name.

As the motor rolled out on to the boulevard, he went back to his desk, and taking up the speaking tube, he whistled down it. "Madame Colbec? I have something important to say to you!"

He heard the quick answer, "At your service always, Monsieur."

"A doctor is coming to see Lady Waverton this morning. *Before* he sees Miladi, show him yourself into my bedroom."

There came a surprised: "Do you feel ill, Monsieur?"

"I am not very well; and I have reason to think this doctor is an old friend of mine. But I do not wish Dr. Scorpion to know that he is not being shown straight into

the bedroom of his English lady patient. Have I made myself clear?"

He heard her quick word of assent. Madame Colbec was as sharp as a needle, and she had once had reason to be profoundly grateful to Hercules Popeau. He could trust her absolutely; sometimes he called her, by way of a joke, "Madame Discretion."

Hercules Popeau always did everything in what he called to himself an artistic—an Englishman would have said a thorough—way. Thus, before getting into his bed, he entirely undressed and drew together the curtains of his bedroom windows. Thus anyone coming into the room from the sunny corridor outside would feel in darkness, while to one whose eyes were already accustomed to the dim light, everything would be perfectly clear.

He had already been in bed half an hour, when at last the door opened, and he heard Madame Colbec say in a smooth tone, "Entrez, Monsieur le Docteur." His heart gave a leap, for the slight individual who had just been shown into the darkened room was undoubtedly his Scorpion—the man he had known twenty years ago. The doctor had been about thirty when he had got into the very serious trouble which had brought him into touch with the then Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, so he must now be fifty.

With a sardonic look on his powerful face Hercules Popeau watched his visitor grope forward a little uncertainly.

"Miladi," he said at last, in an ill-assured tone, "I will ask your permission to draw the curtains a little? Otherwise I cannot see you!"

He put his hat on a chair as he spoke, and then he went towards the nearest window, and pulled apart the curtains, letting in a stream of light; he turned towards the bed—

"It is a long time since we have met, my good doctor."

For a moment Popeau thought that the man who stood stock-still staring at him, as if petrified, was about to fall down in a faint. And a feeling of regret, almost of shame,

came over him, for he was a kindly man, at having played the other such a trick.

But the visitor made a great effort to regain his composure, and at last, with a certain show of valour, he exclaimed: "I have been shown into the wrong room. I am here to see a lady who is ill."

"That is so," said Popeau quietly. "But I, too, feel ill, and hearing that you had been called to this hotel, I thought I would see you first, to ask your advice. I confess I wondered if you were the Dr. Scorpion I had once known?"

To the unfortunate man who stood in the middle of the large room there was a terrible edge of irony in the voice that uttered those quiet words.

"Of course, I know that in the old days you were more accustomed to diagnose the state of an ailing woman than that of a man," went on the ex-police chief pitilessly.

And then he changed his tone. "Come, come!" he exclaimed. "I have no right to go back to the past! Draw a chair close up to my bed, and tell me how you have got on all these years?"

With obvious reluctance the doctor complied with this almost command. "I have now been in very respectable practice for some time." He waited a moment, then he added bitterly. "Can you wonder that seeing you gave me a moment of great discomfort, reminding me of certain errors of my youth for which I have bitterly repented?"

"I am glad to hear you have repented," said Popeau quietly.

In a clearer, calmer tone Scorpion went on, "I made a good marriage; I have a sweet wife and two excellent children."

"Good! Good!"

Hercules Popeau held out his hand. The other took it. And then the detective felt a sensation of violent recoil, for it was as if the hand he held was a dead hand. It was icy cold—an infallible sign of shock. The ex-police chief felt a touch of sharp remorse. He had nothing in him of

the feline human being who likes to play with a man or a woman as a big cat plays with a mouse.

III

Lord and Lady Waverton and their friend had arrived on a Sunday night, and Dr. Scorpion's first visit to the hotel had been paid on the Tuesday morning. As the week went on Lady Waverton, while still keeping to her room, became convalescent, though the doctor recommended that her ladyship should go on being careful till the day that she was to leave Paris, that is on the Saturday.

On the Friday morning Madame Colbec herself brought up Hercules Popeau's *petit déjeuner*. She looked anxious and worried. "Miladi is worse," she said abruptly. "I have already telephoned for the doctor. The countess is greatly distressed! I must hurry, as I have to serve an English breakfast for two in the next room at once."

A few minutes later Popeau, peeping through the slanting "Judas," sat watching Lord Waverton and the Countess Filenska. After having exchanged a long, passionate embrace, they had sat down, but the excellent omelette prepared by Madame Colbec remained untasted. It was almost as if they were quarrelling, for the first words uttered by the Englishman were:

"I don't see why you should go to England to-day——"

She said firmly, "It is imperative that I should see the man who is going to Russia on Saturday."

"Well, then, if you go——" he had the grace to look ashamed, "I don't see why I shouldn't go, too! Gracie hates to have me about her when she's ill. I can't help thinking that the sensible thing to do would be to get a trained nurse over from England."

The Countess looked violently disturbed. She was pouring some black coffee into her cup, and Popeau saw that the beautiful hand trembled.

"You cannot do better than leave Gracie in the French doctor's hands," she explained. "He is wonderful!"

There came a knock at the door, and Doctor Scorpion came in.

"I am, indeed, sorry," he began, "to hear that my patient is worse——" but the Countess cut him short. "Let us go to her!" she exclaimed, and together they left the room.

A few moments later the Countess came back.

"Gracie is better," she observed. "She will probably be able to go home next Tuesday or Wednesday."

She put her hand caressingly through Lord Waverton's arm. "I will go over to England to-day at four o'clock, and I will be back here by to-morrow night. What do you say of that for devotion?"

Her lover's face cleared. "Does that mean——"

"That I am a foolish woman? That I do not like being away from you even for quite a little while? Yes, it does!"

She submitted—the unseen watcher thought with a touch of impatience—to his ardent caresses. Suddenly the door behind the screen opened. The two sprang apart and, as the doctor edged his way in, Lord Waverton left the room.

Scorpion looked at the Countess fixedly. "Is it true that Madame la Comtesse is going away to England to-day?"

"I shall return to Paris to-morrow," she said evasively.

"I have thought matters over, and I refuse to go on with the treatment before payment, or part payment, is made," he said firmly.

"Come, don't be unreasonable!" she exclaimed.

He answered at once, in a fierce, surly tone, "I cannot risk my head unless it is made worth my while. Cannot you invent something which requires at once an advance from the Milord of, say——" he hesitated, then slowly uttered the words, "fifty thousand francs?"

Popeau expected to hear a cry of protest, but the beautiful woman who now stood close to the ugly, clever-looking little doctor opened her hand-bag and said coldly, "I have something here which is worth a great deal more than fifty thousand francs," and she handed him the jewel-case which contained the emerald pendant.

Scorpion opened the case. He looked at the gorgeous

stone with glistening, avid eyes. Slowly he shut the jewel-case and put it in his pocket.

"Then you will keep your promise?"

There was a long pause. The doctor produced a loose-leaved prescription block.

"I will fulfil my promise," he said firmly, "if you will write on this sheet of paper what I dictate." He handed her a fountain pen:

> "My dear friend and doctor,—I beg you to accept the jewel I am sending you, a square-cut emerald, which is my own property to dispose of, in consideration of the great care and kindness you showed me when I was so extremely ill last year.—Your ever grateful, OLGA FILENSKA."

She hesitated for what seemed, both to the invisible watcher and to her accomplice, a long time. But at last she wrote out the words he had dictated.

Scorpion put the sheet of paper in the pocket where already reposed the jewel-case.

"C'est entendu," he exclaimed, and turned towards the door.

A moment later Hercules Popeau telephoned to Madame Colbec: "Make some pretext to keep the doctor till I come down!"

He took out of a drawer a large sheet of notepaper headed *Prefecture de Police, Paris.* On it he wrote as follows:

> "Madame,—You are in grave danger. The man you are employing to rid you of your rival is affiliated to the French Police. He has revealed your plot. An affidavit sworn to by him will reach Scotland Yard in the course of to-morrow. A copy of the sworn statement of Dr. Scorpion will also be laid before Lord Waverton, who will be summoned to appear as a witness at the extradition proceedings. An admirer of your beauty thinks it kind to warn you that you will be well advised to break

your journey to-day. The value of the jewel which I enclose is eight hundred pounds sterling."

He put the letter in his drawer, and then he ran downstairs.

Scorpion was chatting to Madame Colbec in her tiny office. He looked surprised and disturbed when he saw Hercules Popeau.

"How is your patient, my good Scorpion?"

"Going on fairly," said the other hesitatingly. "Though not well enough to leave the hotel to-morrow, as she hoped to do."

"I have a word to say to you." Popeau's voice had become cold and serious. "We will go upstairs to my rooms."

Scorpion stumbled up the staircase of the grand old house. He was too frightened to know what he was doing, or where he was going. When he reached the landing the other man took hold of his shoulder and pushed him through the door of his study. Then he locked the door, and turning, faced his abject visitor:

"The first thing I ask you to do is to put on the table the emerald which has just been given you as the price of blood."

"The emerald? What do you mean?" he faltered.

"You know well what I mean!"

A look of rage came over the livid face. "Does that woman dare to call me a thief?" he exclaimed. "See what she herself wrote when she gave me this jewel!" And with a shaking hand he drew a folded sheet of paper from his pocket.

"I want that, too."

Scorpion sank down on a chair, and the ex-police chief came and stood over him. "Listen carefully to what I am going to say, Scorpion."

The wretched man looked up, his eyes full of terror, while Popeau went on, tonelessly:

"Once more I am going to allow you to escape the fate which is your due. Last time it was for the sake of your

mother. This time it will be for the sake of two women—your good wife, and the unfortunate lady whom you, or perhaps I ought to say your temptress and accomplice, had doomed to a hideous death by poison."

Scorpion stared up at him without speaking; his face had gone the colour of chalk.

"This morning you dictated a letter to your accomplice, Scorpion, and I now dictate to you the following confession."

> "I, Victor Scorpion, confess to having entered into a conspiracy with a woman I know under the name of the Countess Filenska, to bring about the death of Lady Waverton on——"

Popeau looked fixedly at Scorpion.

"What day was she to die?" he asked.

Scorpion stared at his tormentor. He did not, he felt he could not, answer.

At last he said in a whimpering voice, "I did not mean the poor Miladi to die."

"But what day did the Countess expect her to die?"

Popeau had to bend down to hear the words:

"Next Monday."

"Write down the proposal put to you."

> "I was to receive five hundred pounds sterling on the day of her death, and within six months of the Countess's marriage to Lord Waverton ten thousand pounds sterling, whatever the rate of exchange might be at the time."—(Signed) VICTOR ALGER SCORPION.

"Do allow me to put down that I did not intend to carry out this infamous plan?" he asked pleadingly.

Popeau hesitated. "No," he said, "I will not allow you to do that. But this I will promise. Within a few hours from now you yourself shall do what you wish with that piece of paper."

"And now," he went on, "you can make yourself at

home in these two rooms, and you will have the use of my bathroom beyond." He smiled genially. "You may also telephone home to your wife, saying you will not be home till late."

IV

The woman whom some of her English friends called "the dark lady" had settled herself very comfortably in a first-class compartment of the Paris-Calais express. She was quite alone, for in July there are few travellers to England. So she was rather taken aback when a big man, dressed in a pale grey alpaca suit, suddenly thrust his body and head through the door leading into the corridor.

"Have I the honour of speaking to the Countess Filenska?" he said.

She hesitated a moment. Then she saw that he held in his hand a bulky envelope, and involuntarily she smiled. From dear, foolish Waverton, of course! A *billet doux,* accompanied, no doubt, by some delightful gift.

She held out her hand, "I am the Countess Filenska," she said pleasantly.

"I have been told to give you this, Madame. I am glad I have had the good fortune to arrive before the train started."

He lifted his hat and walked off.

The train started; slowly she broke the seal of the big envelope. Yes, there was a jewel case! Eagerly she opened it, and then came mingled disappointment and surprise, for it only contained the emerald which she had given that morning to Scorpion.

With a feeling of sudden apprehension she unfolded the piece of note paper which accompanied it. Slowly, with eyes dilated with terror, she read the terrible words written there.

Could she leap out of the train? No, it was moving too quickly. She could not afford to risk an accident. Feverishly she counted over her money. Yes, she had enough, amply enough, to break her journey at Calais, and go on

to——? After a moment's deep thought she uttered aloud the word "Berlin."

Late that same afternoon Madame Colbec opened the door of Hercules Popeau's study.

"Milord Waverton," she murmured in a nervous tone.

The Englishman walked in. He looked uncomfortable, even a little suspicious. He felt anxious. Was his wife worse, and was the man who had asked to see him a specialist?

"I have a painful, as well as a serious, communication to make to your lordship," began Hercules Popeau in slow, deliberate tones. "I belong to the French Criminal Investigation Department, and a most sinister fact has just been brought to our notice."

He looked fixedly—it was a long, searching glance—into the other man's bewildered face. And then he felt a thrill of genuine relief. Lord Waverton, so much was clear, was quite unconscious of the horrible plot which had had for object that of ridding him of his wife.

"The fact brought to our notice," went on Popeau quietly, "concerns Lady Waverton."

"My wife? Impossible!"

Lord Waverton drew himself up to his full height. He looked angry, as well as incredulous.

"Lady Waverton," went on the other, "possesses a terrible enemy."

"I assure you," said Lord Waverton coldly, "that the French police have made some absurd mistake. My wife is the best of women, kindness itself to all those with whom she comes in contact. *I* may have enemies; she has none."

"Lady Waverton has an enemy," said Popeau positively. "And what is more, that enemy intended to compass her death, and, indeed, nearly succeeded in doing so."

The Englishman stared at the Frenchman. He felt as if he was confronting a lunatic.

"This enemy of Lady Waverton's laid her plans—for it is a woman—very cleverly," said Popeau gravely. "She discovered in this city of Paris a man who will do anything

for money. That man is a doctor, and for what appeared to him a sufficient consideration he undertook to poison her ladyship."

He waited a moment, then added in an almost casual tone: "Lady Waverton's death was to have occurred next Monday."

"What!" exclaimed Lord Waverton, in a horror-stricken voice, "do you mean the little French doctor who has been attending my wife——"

"Yes," said Hercules Popeau stolidly. "Dr. Scorpion had undertaken to bring about what would have appeared to everybody here, in the Hotel Paragon, a natural death."

Lord Waverton covered his face with his hands.

"Most fortunately for you, my lord, this infamous fellow-countryman of mine grew suddenly afraid, and made a full confession of the hideous plot. He brought with him a written proof, as well *as a valuable emerald,* which was part of the price the would-be murderess was willing to pay the man she intended should be the actual murderer."

The speaker turned away, for he desired to spare the unhappy man, whose sudden quick, deep breathing showed the awful effect those last words had had on him.

The rest of the blood money—ten thousand pounds sterling—was to be paid when Scorpion's temptress became the second wife of a wealthy English peer."

Lord Waverton gave a strangled cry.

Popeau took out of his pocket the two documents, the deed of gift written out by the Countess and the confession signed by Scorpion himself.

"I will ask you to read these through," he said. And then, after Lord Waverton had read Scorpion's confession, he opened the door of the bedroom.

"Come here a moment," he called out, "I have done with that paper I asked you to sign, and I am ready to give it you back the moment you have informed this gentleman that you wrote it. Say in English, 'I, Scorpion, swear that all that I wrote down here is true, and that this is my signature.' "

The man repeated the words in a faltering voice.

Popeau handed him his confession. "Take this piece of paper," he observed, "down into the courtyard; there set a light to it, and watch it burn; then go home and thank the good God and your good wife that you have not begun the long road which leads to the Devil's Island."

After Scorpion had left the room, Hercules Popeau turned to the Englishman. "I trust," he said, "that your lordship will not think it impertinent if I ask you to listen to me for yet another two or three minutes."

Lord Waverton bent his head. His face had gone grey under its tan.

"I am old enough to be your father, and this would I say to you, and I trust that you will take it in good part. There was a time, not long ago, when a man in your position was guarded by high invisible barriers from any terrible dangers. Those barriers are no longer——"

There came a knock at the door. A telegram was handed to Lord Waverton. He tore open the envelope.

> "An unexpected chance has come my way of getting back to Russia and of recovering some of my lost property. Good-bye, dear friends. Thank you both for your goodness to an unhappy woman."

As Lord Waverton handed the two slips of paper to his new friend, Hercules Popeau looked much relieved.

"All you have to do," he exclaimed, "is to show Miladi this telegram, and then to give her—how do you say it in English?—a good kiss on her sweet face!"

SIDNEY GOWING

THE POACHER

"TIGHT places," said Commander Venables reflectively, "are of two kinds, pleasant and unpleasant. It's simply joss whether you get out or not. To be blackmailed for murder, particularly if one knows that one is guilty, belongs to the unpleasant class. And that's what happened to me in——"

"Stop!" said Edward Strachan, and held up three fingers to the silent steward who was crossing the room.

The three commanders sat in the warmest corner of the smoking-room at the Naval Barracks, Portsmouth. A soft rain beat upon the windows. Not for half an hour would they need to tramp through the wet dockyard to the Asia pontoon.

Commander Robert Venables, popularly "Bolo," was long and slim, with a clear mahogany complexion, whimsical eyes, and a masterful beak of a nose. Burdon-Lee was precisely his opposite type, light-coloured and dreamy, with a crop of freckles that powdered his face and overflowed into his hair. Strachan was small and agile, his expression alert and wary. All three were of the same term on Britannia, and had seen many windy terms since the old ship passed.

The steward placed three glasses on the table. Strachan lifted one of them and blinked at Commander Venables.

"A small tribute to the most ingenious liar in the Service," he murmured. "Go on, Bolo; we are listening."

Burdon-Lee shook his head at Strachan and smiled cryptically. Venables' brows knitted in protest.

"One may occasionally pull a leg, Ned," he said quietly,

(Copyright, 1928, by Sidney Gowing.)

"but what I am about to tell you is the truth in all its amplitude."

Ned set down his empty glass and sighed.

"The secant of the Latitude plus the sine of the Declination equals the sine of the True Amplitude," he said. "Proceed."

"In 19—," said Bolo, "while a sweet little lootenant, I got my first command. After looking in at Gieve's to buy a larger size in caps, I hoisted my pennant and so forth on the fishery protection ship *Jaguar*. She'd just finished refitting at Chatham. My orders were to proceed north and relieve her sister ship *Ocelot*, on duty at Aberdeen.

"I might have known that was a bad omen to start with. The devil invented Chatham and its climate and surroundings, and one of his chief outlying dependencies is Aberdeen. But I didn't worry. As a two-ringer with a first command I was feeling about three sizes larger than Drake.

"I took the *Jaguar*—by the way, I'm dazzle-painting all the names in this show so as not to hurt people's feelings—into Tynemouth on my way, and there I met the *Ocelot*. She had orders to come south without waiting for me to relieve her. So, of course, her commanding officer came on board to hand over the glad news.

"And that," said Bolo, "is where I first tumbled that there was something dark and sinister lurking in those misty seas. The skipper of *Ocelot* was sort of pallid and jumpy and depressed—like a man who's just been a prisoner, or a medium, or a co-respondent or something. *You* know, Ned."

"Who was he?" asked Strachan.

"Jones. Lieutenant Jones."

"Good name," murmured Strachan.

"He left the service ages ago, having come into horrid opulence, and now he breeds Black Berkshires and takes medals for 'em. So there's no harm in mentioning him; he's a ship that's passed in the night. Well, old Jones sat in my wardroom looking like the ghost of himself and

throwing out dark warnings that I couldn't make head or tail of.

" 'Look here, old thing,' I said, 'I wish you'd say right out what you mean. What are you hinting at?'

" 'Oh, nothing!' said Jones.

" 'You aren't stuffy because they've sent me up north to do you out of this stunt?' said I. It was Jones's first command. 'Goodness knows I never wanted the job!'

" 'Good lord, no!' said Jones. 'I was never so glad to be shifted in my life. Don't make any mistake about that.' He lit up one of my cigars, and his fist was pretty shaky. 'I had a bit of a shock up there, and perhaps I haven't quite got over it.'

"I waited for him to open out. Jones was an old pal of mine, and one of the best. But there was nothing doing.

" 'All I can tell you,' he said, 'is to keep your weather eye lifting if you come across any of those Scandinavian fishermen, 'specially the Danes and Swedes.'

" 'Naturally. That was what I'm sent for.'

" 'They're an obstinate crowd,' said Jones. 'You steer clear of them, that's what I mean.'

" 'How on earth d'you suppose I'm going to do that?' said I. 'If I catch 'em poaching inside our three-mile limit I've got to run 'em in. That's what all the row's about.'

" 'I know,' said Jones. 'But if you have any trouble, or they refuse to heave to, don't fire over them—unless you're very sure of your gunner.'

" 'I never heard such bosh as you're talking!' said I. 'Why don't you tell me what you're driving at, if it's anything?'

" 'It isn't—much,' said Jones, getting red. 'I was a fool to have mentioned it at all. If you happen to come across a steam trawler called the *Sverige*—but never mind that. We've been pals long enough for me to give you a hint, and for the same reason, if you should chance to hear of any trouble connected with me while you're up there, I know you're not the chap to spread it about. I've had a

bit of a shake up, as I said, and I think I may cut the Service.'

" 'Skittles!' said I.

" 'I'm going home on three weeks' leave, and I shall think it over. Good-night, old son, and the best of luck to you,' said old Jones, and he pushed off forlornly. There was no getting anything more out of him."

I sailed on the next tide, wondering what had happened to Jones. It wasn't like him. He used to have a nerve like cold brass, and was generally a merry sort of pup. However, one takes things as they come, and I didn't worry.

I reported in the Forth, and eventually reached my beat, which was Invergordon to Cromarty. It took us a while to get there. The *Jaguar* was a holy terror. She was a converted trawler. They'd only kept her on because she was cheap to run; cheapness was the slogen just then. Her speed was about the same as a horse tramcar—she could barely do ten knots, and eight was nearer her average.

In fact she was the sort of craft that does get detailed to protect fisheries in peace time—apparently for the reason that a fairly fast iron-built trawler with a bad conscience is quite likely to outsteam her. However, a first command's a first command, and I wouldn't have swopped with the Number One of the flag-ship. We patrolled for six days in thick weather, and there was absolutely nothing doing. It was a bit lonely, of course.

"Who was your sub?" asked Strachan.

"Didn't have a sub. Second-in-command was a gunner—a glorious old bottle-nosed gunner, with a wary eye and a black torpedo-beard. One of the very best; his name was John Pym—same as the irreverent blighter who started Charles the Martyr on his road to the scaffold. Probably a descendant. You remember Green's history: 'Pym himself rose only to sit down choked with tears'? But *my* John never wept. The only tears shed on that cruise were my own.

"On the evenin' of the seventh day I was up on the bridge talkin' over the evolution with Mr. Pym. I told him the Danish trawlers were causing a lot of trouble fishing in British waters, but it seemed as if our Joss was out, as far as catching 'em went.

"Yes, sir," says Pym, "and the Aberdeen fishermen are pretty sick about it. There's some rich grounds here, and the Board of Fisheries has called a close time on them."

"The trouble is," I said, "that while the Scotch fishermen respect the closed waters, the foreigners don't. They run in and rake the protected grounds, and sweep off with big hauls—mainly at night. They find it worth while, even with the risk of losing their gear and having a fifty pound fine to pay."

"Our fishers catch it a lot hotter when the Danish gunboats nab 'em up Iceland way," said Pym, who was feeling a bit vindictive about it. And ten minutes later as we rounded Scaith Head, keepin' pretty close in, the signalman calls: "Trawler inshore, with her gear down, sir!"

Pym and I picked her up at the same moment, and we got the glasses on her.

"She's a Dutchman, sir!" said Pym; he belonged to the early vintage and called all Swedes, Danes and Huns, Dutchmen. The trawler was a big red iron Dane. Poacher? By gad, she was scooping up the bottom right through the thick of the reservation!

The Dane was nearly two miles away, and we closed him. I hoisted the International signal, "Stop instantly."

He took no more notice of my signal than if it had been the steward's shirt. He didn't even slip his trawl, but waited to yank it aboard—*that* was what galled me—and when he'd done it we'd gained a mile on him. Then he steered straight out to sea.

He had the legs of us. He made a good twelve knots, and there was the old *Jaguar* thumpin' and gruntin' after him, doin' about eleven—and that was a miracle. But my chief E.R.A. actually whacked her up till we were holding the Dane, and even gainin' a little. What it was like in

the engine-room I don't know. Hell must have been a holiday to it.

"It'll be dark in half an hour," growled old Pym in his beard, "and then we'll lose him."

I could see that for myself. And I gave the order "Starboard gun's crew, close up!" And I knew old Pym wondered why I hadn't done it before. But something at the back of my head told me not to; perhaps it was the whisper of Jones.

"Common shell!" I said; "give her one across the bows, but well outside of her."

There was an old four-inch drainpipe forward, but we didn't use that. We carried a three-pounder on each bow, and the shell kicked up a pretty little spurt about fifty yards ahead of the Dane.

He held on, with the sparks flying out of his smoke-stack. He must have known we had him set, though he took no more notice than if we were blowing him kisses. And then I fairly lost my wool. I wasn't the philosopher in those days that I am now. One couldn't have the beggar defying one like that.

"Give him another," I said. "Closer aboard!"

Wang! went the three-pounder again. The trawler stopped her engines and swung head to sea, and I saw the crew running about on her like ants when you stir 'em up with a stick.

"Stopped her that time, sir!" said Pym, grinning. "She shut down as quick as if she'd been hit."

"Lucky for her she wasn't," said I. And we ran down alongside her. As we came round her stern I saw the name under her counter—*"Sverige—Esbjerg."*

I didn't give more than a glance to that. I was looking at something different.

Just outside the Dane's wheelhouse lay a thing that looked like a lump of clothes—till I saw it was a man in a jersey and sea-boots, all broken and doubled up, and the deck round it was dark with blood.

The shell was a blind shell, but it had caught one of them. Pym hailed the trawler—my voice had dried up a

bit. Her crew was lowering a boat, and the skipper called out in English:

"Ja, I vos comin' to you!" he said. "You haf done your work vell, captain. You haf kill my mate!"

This was a long time ago, you know. Since then one has seen plenty of dead men, and a good many of one's own pals, too. One gets used to that.

But this was peace time. And this was my first dead man.

And when I saw that poor devil of a fisherman lying there all smashed up I felt physically and mentally sick. It wasn't only that the Admiralty would probably break me for it—you never know how they'll take an affair like that. It was the thing itself. I saw two of the crew lift up the body and carry it slowly down the hatchway.

The skipper was alongside in his boat. I told him to come abroad. He was a big ruffian, about fifty, with a tangle of red hair and whiskers. I took him to the chart-room.

"Vell," he said, "you vill haf to answer for dis, captain."

"Nobody can regret it more than I do," said I. "I would give anything if it could be undone, captain. The shell was not meant to do any harm, and I'm at a loss to know how it struck your ship. Why did you run for it? You have brought it on yourself."

"Ve vas nod doing any harm!" said the skipper. "My ship vos oudside der Scotch waters, as all mine crew can swear."

I told him it was no use taking that line. He was a mile inside the limit when we saw him, in a prohibited area to boot. For that matter we were in British waters still.

"Vell den," says the skipper very grimly, "ve vas your brisoners, and you vill haf to answer to my Government and to yours for der dead man dot is on my ship."

I didn't need telling that. I was envying the dead man. But I didn't answer him for a moment or two, and the Dane came up closer.

"See here, captain," he said, "maybe dere vas no need for you to be cut oud from der Navy, nor for me and my

ship to be brought in as brisoners! Suppose we settle it up between us, eh?"

I asked him what on earth he meant.

"Look see; der dead man haf a widow and children. Dey get nodings from your Government; dey vill say he was a poacher. But you gif me one hondred pound English for der widow, and leave it at dot. I got ay avvid my ship, der dead man he is buried at sea, and all go vell. You can trust your men nod to talk?"

I fancy neither of you fellows have been up against anything like that. When I got over the first shock of the offer, it was like a life-buoy to a drowning man. It looked so reasonable on the face of it. There was the poor chap's widow to think of. It seemed to be all one could do. On the other side was the enquiry, and the publicity and all the other beastliness, if I ran the ship in. With the moral certainty of having to leave the Service—even if I wasn't chucked out. And the first cause of it all was a few baskets of fish in the trawler's hold. But I think it was the widow I had in mind. What would you have done?

Strachan shifted in his seat.

"Don't care to pose as a moralist," he said. "I believe—I would have paid up."

Burdon-Lee nodded.

"I told the skipper I hadn't so much money on board," continued Venables.

"You haf your cheque-book, aind it?" said he. "Gif me a draft on your bank—dot vas goot enough for me."

My cheque-book was in the cabin, and I brought it up and started to fill in the cheque to "Self"—and then, somehow, I stopped, and chucked down the pen.

"No," I said. "Won't do. I'll take you and the body to Aberdeen."

I took a dekko at him. He was looking queer.

"You haf more sense, captain," said he. "You vill be disgrace and thrown out of the Service—more better we settle it up. Tink of der vidow!"

"I am," said I. "I'm thinking it's little of the money

she'll touch if it goes through your hands. This goes up to headquarters."

The fellow offered to take £50. He began to storm. He said he'd hold his tongue for nothing if he were allowed to go. I cut all that out and called to Pym.

"Mr. Pym," said I, "detail a prize crew and take charge of the trawler. Take station astern, and follow me to Aberdeen. The skipper will remain here with me."

"Ay ay, sir!" said Pym.

The skipper seemed inclined to break loose and go berserk, but my gunner's mate tactfully shepherded him down below. Just before Pym pushed off he allowed himself a word with me.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said sympathetically, "but don't let this worry you, if you'll excuse an old hand sayin' so. It was an accident an' you weren't to blame, nor the gun's crew either—we can all swear to that. You'd have been in the right if you'd sunk him, after he refused to heave to. It might come all right yet."

It was pretty cold comfort for me. While the trawler was following us astern, with Pym in charge, I thought it over. You know what the Admiralty are. It was a level certainty they'd make me the goat. And that wasn't the worst of it.

Nerves aren't a failing of mine. But I got 'em then. It was just gettin' dusk, and the trawler, snooping along behind us like a ghost, was worse than having the Flying Dutchman in tow. There was nothing missing. The crew had hoisted the Danish colours at half-mast as a sign of mourning, and there was a big black cloth over the hatch of the cabin where the dead fisherman lay. I was glad the skipper hadn't asked me aboard to view the body. I felt I couldn't have stood that.

To keep my mind off the question of resignation v. cashiering, I tried to think out what sort of a letter I'd write to the widow——

It was about ten minutes later—though it seemed like an age—that I sensed trouble astern of us. There was quite a little riot on board the trawler, and my prize crew

was mopping it up. It didn't take 'em long. I dropped back abreast 'em.

"What are you about?" I yelled through the megaphone. "Can't you keep order, man!"

Then I saw Pym coming up the hatchway with a large bundle in his arms.

"Beg pardon, sir! Got message of importance to communicate," he said. "Will you slow her and take me aboard?"

Wondering what on earth he was about, I had both ships stopped; the Dane's crew were jabberin' and protestin', but my quartermaster brought 'em to attention. Pym came off in the trawler's boat.

"Can I see you in the chart-room a moment, sir," he said, and in we went, Pym carrying his burden. It was wrapped in a sail-cover, and strippin' this off, he flung into my chair, a limp, inert body in a jersey and fisherman's boots. I pretty nearly jumped out of mine, for I'd got all I could stand.

"How dare you!" I said—and then I short circuited, for Pym was wearing a sardonic grin, like the figure-head of the old Medusa. I took another look at the body.

Its limbs were round an' thick, shapeless as sausages, its sea-boots were tied on with string, an' there was sticky red stuff on the jersey.

"What's this?" said I.

"That's the Dutchman you murdered, sir," said Pym, grinning in a disciplined way.

"Good lord! D'you mean to say it's a dummy-run?"

"Precisely, sir. A dummy-run it is, an' nothin' else."

I dropped into the other chair, opposite the corpse. When I had wiped away the tears, Pym reported. He didn't laugh—a grin was his limit.

"As soon as we'd taken station, sir, I took a look round, as you might say, havin' my suspicions. They'd mopped up the deck when I got aboard, but I know what red paint is, havin' seen it before.

"Havin' worked out the observation, I thought I'd take a look at that corpse laid reverently below. The Dutchmen

wanted to get in the way, but we soon put that right. I went down an' found this gory old effigy in a bunk, with some of the red paint still on him. They were just goin' to take him to pieces, but havin' more respect for the dead, I brought him away as he is."

I laughed till the scuttles rattled, while the body wagged in its chair—you'd have sworn it was laughing, too. Then I shook hands with Pym.

"Pym," I said, "you've more of the red distilled essence of strategy than the Admiralty War Staff. I didn't dream of a bluff. It looked so beastly natural."

"Jus' so, sir. From a bit of a distance it took us all in, an' I reckon they've played this game before; they've got the thing brought down too fine for new hands. They saw we were bound to catch 'em, so they put up this dummy-an'-red-paint evolution. Likely they thought they'd scare us into letting 'em go."

"That ruffian offered to take a hundred and say nothing about it," I said.

Pym coughed.

"The Admiralty's so squeamish nowadays, sir," said he, "otherwise the yardarm'd be the best cure for that skipper."

"I'm fed up with dead men," said I. "Carry on, Mr. Pym. We will proceed to Aberdeen. I shall see you get full credit."

Pym saluted, and went back to the prize.

The Danish skipper, watching through the scuttle of the artificers' mess-room below, had seen the body come aboard, and was wise. He requested an audience of me, and he was an agitated skipper.

"It was nodings but a choke, captain!" he said, gnawing his lips, "a choke——"

"Yes," said I, for I wasn't feeling vindictive any longer; "and you'll find it a pretty expensive brand of joke. You'll be lucky if that £100 you got last month covers your fine for fish-poaching. The less you talk the better for you."

I spent the next two hours blessing Pym. I wasn't the

first Loot-in-command who'd been hauled out of the gumbo by a warrant-officer—though one wouldn't say so in mixed company. The sea had given up its dead; I was entitled to laugh, and I did. But mine is a sympathetic soul, and I found time for a tear of pity, too.

Now I knew what happened to Jones!

This was the same trawler that the *Ocelot* had nabbed. Poor old Jones had given me the name—the *Sverige*. I remembered that now. It was as clear as a searchlight. The Dane had played off this stunt on Jones, and got away with it.

Knaves grow bold by success. The *Sverige* wasn't expecting another protection ship along so soon, and when I dropped on her out of the mist she tried the same game on me. It nearly came off.

Jones of the *Ocelot* had parted a hundred, and was wondering whether murder would out. No wonder Jones was down in the mouth! But then he was minus a Pym; that's where I had the pull. I was sorry for Jones.

Eighteen hours later, *Jaguar* and her prize made Aberdeen; the S.O. in charge—old copper-nosed Bickerstaffe, a great discipline and spit-and-polish man—came on board my flag-ship. His eyes bulged out like a land-crab's as he stood lookin' at a headless and crimson-stained dummy corpse, which we'd lashed to the fore-stay by way of a figure-head.

"Eh!" he gurgled. "What the doose? How—eh—what——"

"That's a peaceful fisherman, sir, caught guttin' haddocks in Scottish waters, and shot as an example to others," said I; "if you'll come below, sir, I'll explain."

We had out the wardroom port, and I explained. Bickerstaffe laughed till the old *Jaguar* started sheddin' rivets. And presently Aberdeen—which is a town unjustly accused of seeing jokes with difficulty—was laughing too.

Strachan drew a deep breath. "*The* most superb liar that ever passed out of Greenwich," he murmured.

Commander Burdon-Lee rose.

"Ned," he said reprovingly. "I cannot sit here and

hear our Bolo accused. To my knowledge there is but one mis-statement in this little report of his."

"One?"

"Yes, one. It is not true that Jones left the Service.

"I am 'Jones'—sometime of the *Ocelot*.

"Bolo relieved my mind of the guilt of blood, not that I worried about that, I'm not as tender in the heart as Bolo, and the fear of getting hauled over the coals, by sending me a packing-case per passenger train carriage paid. It contained the limp dummy of a fisherman, and it had cost me a cold hundred.

"With it was triplicate indent note: 'Corpse, Danish, one in number,' signed 'Bolo.' It was very thoughtful of Bolo."

ANTHONY WYNNE

THE TINKLE OF THE BELLS

Doctor Hailey glanced at the heavy type and then let the newspaper, which he had just bought, fall to the floor of the car. The shouting of the vendors of early editions containing this bombshell mingled in his ears with the deep roar of the traffic in Regent Street. He could see the eager men and women clutching at the sheets and devouring the unwelcome news.

Then he closed his eyes and beheld again the lovely dark face of the girl who had been his partner at dinner the night before and who had confided to him that The Wizard was bound to win the Derby because she had dreamed that she saw him passing the post a length ahead of the rest of the field. Zazel Belamy had added that the fact that she had Romany blood in her veins made her dreams well nigh infallible.

So much for Romany blood!

His mind drifted to the owner of the racehorse whose victory, until this minute forty-eight hours before the great race, had been regarded by the whole country as assured. Lord Steadhouse was too good a sportsman to resent any blow which fortune might deal him; but if this blow was really serious it would test his courage to the very utmost. The Wizard was more than a likely colt; he was a supremely great horse whose name already had achieved imperishable glory.

The car drew up in the throng at Oxford Circus. The buyers and the sellers of news were so busy here that they risked their lives every moment, rushing in and out of the

(From "Sinners Go Secretly," by Anthony Wynne. Copyright, 1927, by J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, and by Hutchinson & Company, London, England.)

maze of traffic. Consternation was on every face, as though some national calamity was immediately toward. It was like scratching of the Tetrarch over again, with added emphasis. Even the policemen on point duty waved their directions with less than their usual aplomb. He caught, through the open window, the remark of a 'bus driver to one of his colleagues: " 'Oo says Centaur now for a win? Eh, Bill?"

Next moment his car was gliding up towards Portland Place. It swung through Queen Ann Street and came to his door. He picked up the newspaper to give to Jenkins, his butler, whose distress he scarcely dared to contemplate. Jenkins' love of race horses was as profound as was his own ignorance of everything about them.

"A telegram for you, sir."

He took the yellow envelope and opened it. Then, as he glanced at its contents, an exclamation of astonishment escaped him. It was from the owner of The Wizard, Lord Steadhouse, and ran:

"Can you come immediately The Yewtrees? Deeply anxious and bewildered."

He handed the telegram and the newspaper together to his servant and stood awaiting the shock of surprise which he knew must follow. When it had subsided a little he asked:

"Well, what do you make of it?"

Jenkins, who remained permanently under the influence of his Nat Gould, drew a sharp breath.

"The 'orse 'as been done in," he declared in a hoarse whisper. "Not a doubt, sir. And it's as a detective and not as a doctor that 'is lordship is asking your 'elp."

That view expressed the situation with great exactitude, as Doctor Hailey encountered it some hours later at the old house on the edge of Newmarket Heath. Lord Steadhouse met him in such a state of agitation as he had not believed possible in a man naturally so self-possessed. He conducted him at once to his smoking room, the door of

which he closed with great care behind them. Then he declared:

"My dear Hailey, there has been foul play here. The very worst of foul play. It is a miracle that the horse has not been scuppered."

The seaman's term, a heritage of his naval service, came from his lips with intense bitterness. Then, suddenly, his expression of anger changed to a look of bewilderment. He added in low tones:

"But in a manner so mysterious that I can make neither head nor tail of it, which must be my excuse for trespassing on the genius of an old friend."

Doctor Hailey had seated himself and found his snuff-box. He took a pinch before he asked for such details of the supposed outrage as were available. The eagerness in his voice made short work of the idea that he had sacrificed himself in any way in coming to the Yewtrees. This eminent specialist in diseases of the human mind was possessed by a passion for the study of mental deformity, as exemplified in crime, which nothing could quench.

"We made the discovery this morning," Lord Steadhouse declared. "The Wizard was found shivering with fear in a corner of his box, his nerve apparently quite gone. I sent for the vet. at once, and he declares that there can be no doubt the colt has suffered some terrible fright. We decided, there and then, to postpone his going to Epsom till to-morrow. But even if he runs I don't believe now that he has a chance."

He paused and the look of perplexity in his eyes deepened.

"It is scarcely credible, in the circumstances, but nevertheless it seems to be absolutely certain that nobody entered his box during the night. There is not a sign, not so much as a suggestion, of any tampering with locks or bolts."

"Does that apply also to the windows?"

"Absolutely. In fact, the largest window has been nailed down. The others are too small, in any case, to enter by, but they were all closed except the skylight and they

have not been disturbed in any way. There is a spider's web intact between the skylight and its frame."

Doctor Hailey took another pinch of snuff.

"I don't pretend to know very much about horses," he said, "but I have heard that they are subject to brain storms, just as certain highly-strung men and women are. It is not possible, is it, that The Wizard was afflicted in that way?"

Lord Steadhouse shook his head. "Oh, no. Quite impossible," he said. "The colt must have shown some signs of nervousness before this if he possessed that trait in his character. As a matter of fact he has never, on any occasion—and remember that I bred him myself—given us the least anxiety. His sire, Permutation, as perhaps you know, had the reputation in his racing days of being the best-tempered horse in training: his dam, Mayfly, I can vouch for myself."

He took a sharp turn across the room and back again.

"Something," he declared in tones of deep conviction, "happened last night. But what it was or how it happened is the most complete mystery of which I have ever had any knowledge."

"One question more and I will ask you to take me to the stables." Doctor Hailey had risen and was standing an immense figure with his back to the empty fireplace. "Did anybody hear anything during the night? I mean any of the stable boys or employees?"

"Not that I know of. One of the lads told me that the owls were hooting very loudly. But that happens here too often to frighten a soul."

They walked through the shrubbery to the group of buildings in which Lord Steadhouse's race horses were accommodated. A man, whom his host introduced as his trainer, Wills, was standing in front of one of the loose boxes.

"I fancy he's a bit quieter now," he told Lord Steadhouse. "I have been listening and haven't heard anything at all."

"There is no further light of any kind?"

"No, nothing."

The man indicated the windows and showed the doctor that the dust on their sills and fastenings had not been disturbed. They were protected below by a wooden lattice which must have effectually prevented any attempt to enter the box through them. He turned to the door and called attention to the heavy locks none of which had so much as been tampered with. Then he opened the upper section very quietly. The Wizard was standing well away from the door. He turned his beautiful head sharply and immediately seemed to shrink, as from sudden danger. They saw a tremor of fear sweep over him. The light was reflected in wonderful undulations from the uncovered portions of his lithe black body. Doctor Hailey felt a sense of quiet and poignant regret. It would, indeed, be calamitous if so perfect an instrument should be turned from its purpose. He glanced at the pale weary face of the trainer beside him. Wills looked like a man who has seen the utter ruin of his life work.

He was a quiet fellow, of the lean and loose-jointed type, whose reputation had not, apparently, affected in the smallest degree the natural simplicity of his character. It was quite obvious that he sorrowed for the horse more than he sorrowed for the race. He spoke to it in gentle, reassuring tones until the tense fear of its pose had relaxed a little. Then he opened the lower portion of the door and entered the box. Lord Steadhouse signed to Doctor Hailey to follow. He was in process of indicating the condition of the locks and windows when his trainer uttered an exclamation of amazement and horror.

"Good heavens, look at this!"

They came to where the horse was standing. Wills had lifted the blanket from The Wizard's flank and was pointing with his free hand to a tiny area on the glossy black coat from which the hair seemed to have been pulled away. The skin at this place was reddened and the surrounding hairs glued together, evidently with blood. Lord Steadhouse gasped:

"A wound!"

"It must be. I don't think the horse could inflict such an injury on itself."

Wills rolled the blanket further back and then added: "I examined his legs carefully this morning, but it didn't occur to me to look under the blanket, seeing that there was no sign of a tear or even a scrape."

He stood back to allow Doctor Hailey to approach nearer. The doctor raised his eyeglass and focused it on the injured skin. Then he passed his hand down the animal's flank.

"The scrape is a superficial one, I think," he said. "The curious thing about it is that it seems to have been inflicted from above downward—and yet one would have imagined that the blanket, in that case, must be torn also."

"It is not torn. It is not even cut. That was why we had no suspicion."

Wills' tones were strained and difficult. He added: "Apparently the scoundrels lifted it before inflicting this wound."

Doctor Hailey moved to the other side of the horse and examined the opposite flank. Then he ran his hand along the animal's ribs and over his forequarters to his neck. As he came to this The Wizard started slightly, as though he had been hurt. He focused his eyeglass again and saw another, similar scrape on the shining skin. It was almost completely covered by the animal's mane. He called his companions' attention to it, and then, leaving them to complete the investigations, made a fresh survey of the doors and windows of the box.

That yielded no further information. He returned to the stable yard where a boy stood regarding the loose-box with melancholy eyes. He beckoned the lad and asked him to conduct him right around the group of buildings.

A wide paddock stretched behind The Wizard's stable. It was empty and the new grass seemed to be entirely unruffled. The doctor searched it in vain for any sign which might afford a clue to the mystery. He told the stable lad to go across the field and examine the fence on the opposite side for indications of attempts to scale it.

He himself walked to a clump of trees situated about a hundred yards from the back of the loose-box.

Nothing rewarded this joint effort, and he returned to the stable. He found owner and trainer still busy with their examination of the colt's skin. They had located a third injury and further had discovered a number of tender places on the animal's neck, small swellings as though blows had recently been inflicted.

Doctor Hailey examined these latter with much greater care than he had bestowed on the scrapes. At his request, the hair covering one of them was gently clipped away by the trainer. There was disclosed a row of tiny abrasions, one at least of which had penetrated the surface layers of the skin. Wills glanced up suddenly at the roof and then cried out in horror:

"Good God! That must be the explanation. It would be quite easy to throw stones down through the skylight."

"It would not, however, be easy to climb on to the roof." Doctor Hailey turned as he spoke and fixed his rather vacant eyes on the trainer's face. "I have just been looking to see if a ladder has been used recently. There is no sign of it."

He completed his examination and let his eyeglass fall.

"There is no opening anywhere, is there," he asked, "large enough to admit the barrel of an air pistol?"

"None."

"In that case we had better re-examine the roof. And then perhaps the boy can be told off to search the tan on the floor here for stones or anything else he can find."

A ladder was brought and Doctor Hailey mounted it. The spider's web of which Lord Steadhouse had spoken remained in position between the frame of the skylight and the window, though it had been broken slightly at one side. He obtained a clear view of the horse below. He called to Wills to raise the window, by means of the cords which ran down into the loose-box, and when this was done he threw a coin against one of the walls below. The colt scarcely seemed to notice this action. Nor did it show any sign of anxiety when the action was repeated.

"Now shut the window, will you?"

As the glass sank into position he tapped sharply on it. And still The Wizard remained unmoved. He descended to the ground, where Lord Steadhouse was awaiting him with the utmost eagerness.

"Well?"

"You saw for yourself. Throwing things from the skylight has no effect on the horse. Had that been the initial cause of his terror there must have been an immediate reaction."

Lord Steadhouse glanced admiringly at his friend. He had not understood the meaning of the tests which he had just witnessed. He nodded his agreement.

"Yes, undoubtedly," he said. "Anything that has frightened a horse once always frightens it a second time, and a third and a fourth, always." He sighed deeply, adding, "so that we are no nearer the solution of the mystery than we were before."

They returned to the house to dinner. Doctor Hailey confessed himself entirely at a loss. He went to bed early because there remained the faint hope that what his reason denied him, his sleeping brain might afford; some clue, perhaps, seen without being consciously observed. He passed in review in his mind all the circumstances of the case, and he was engaged in the process of brain stimulation when he fell asleep.

The process resumed itself automatically when, three hours later, he sat up in bed listening. Footsteps, very light footsteps, but clearly defined and unmistakable nevertheless, were passing on the flagstones under his bedroom window.

He rose and came swiftly to the open casement. He glanced out across the old-world garden towards the block of the stables which showed up as a dark stain on the lightness of the moon-flooded earth. The garden was empty. He could trace the path leading from the house to the stables in almost its whole length, and even the path which joined it, just under his window and which formed a short cut to the main road.

He stood gazing out, with troubled eyes. There could be no doubt about the footsteps, yet it seemed improbable that their author could have made so swift an escape from the garden. The steps had been rather slow, almost halting. Suddenly he caught his breath.

From behind one of the bushes which flanked the path a figure had appeared—a woman.

She seemed to be young, but he could not assure himself on that point. She stood a moment irresolute, then she moved slowly in the direction of the stables, with downcast eyes.

Doctor Hailey uttered an exclamation. He retired into the room and hastily pulled on some of his clothes. He crept out into the silence of the old house and descended the stairs to the front door. With an infinitude of precaution he pulled back the bolts and turned the key in the lock.

The moonlight, as he pushed the door open, caused him to draw back for a moment, so bright and pitiless was it. He glanced out cautiously to assure himself that there was no hidden watcher on this side of the house. Then he crept cautiously along the edge of the flower-bed which lay between the path and the wall of the building. This brought him to a point not far from his bedroom window. He waited, with his eyes fixed on the distant part of the garden.

It was obvious that the intruder had left this area, because no sound of any sort broke the wide stillness of the night. He moved down the path leading to the stables and came to the bush behind which the woman had sheltered. He hesitated whether or not to examine the ground with his lamp, but decided finally against that course.

The pathway at the far end of the garden was barred by a gate, but this, as he had observed on the previous evening, was not kept locked. He passed through it and emerged on the open paddock.

A moment later he had jumped back again among the shadows of the undergrowth. The figure he was following

was crossing the field on his left with the same deliberation which had characterised her movements in the garden. She came to a group of trees. At the same moment the hooting of an owl thrilled in the silence.

He waited, determined to challenge her when she should return. The boldness of the enterprise, carried out at a moment when suspicion was likely to be aroused to its highest point, amazed him. Was it possible that this visit bore no relationship to the injury inflicted on the race horse? Or again, could it be that those who had inflicted the injury believed that no suspicion of its real character would be entertained?

"Good heavens!"

He sprang forward; the woman he was watching had vaulted the fence which enclosed the paddock and disappeared out of sight.

A moment later he saw her again in the next field, apparently striking back towards the high road. That meant that she would pass the stables on her right and not return to the garden at all.

He turned back and ran towards the house. He reached the main avenue and rushed down it to the turnpike. Again he heard the shrill hooting of the owl which resented, apparently, this midnight intrusion on its solitude.

The high road was utterly deserted. He strode along it, keeping as far as possible under the shadow of the hedge. At the first bend from which a long stretch could be commanded, he stood for a moment, listening again. And then suddenly he threw himself down in the ditch.

A twig had snapped a few feet away from him.

A moment later he heard someone jump down into the road. He waited an instant and then leaped to his feet.

As he did so a figure darted past him, a young lithe figure, with a shawl bound about the shoulders, gipsy fashion, swift with the startled energy of a wild animal. The girl had obtained an advantage of more than fifty yards before he sprang in pursuit.

She maintained that lead in spite of his longer stride.

After a few seconds she increased it. They came to a sharp corner and she disappeared from view. He redoubled his effort and swung round the corner after her. Next moment he uttered a cry of amazement. The girl had turned to bay. She had thrown the shawl she was wearing about her face. With incredible, almost tigerish ferocity she rushed at him, bent low suddenly to avoid his grasp and seized him by the knees. He tried to slacken pace but his weight resisted that effort. He felt the ground slip from under his feet. Then he went crashing down head first on the surface of the road, clutching at his assailant as he fell.

For a moment his mind was darkened. When it cleared again, he saw that he was quite alone. In his hand was a piece of torn cloth. He picked himself up painfully and stood gazing with bewildered eyes on the empty landscape. Further pursuit, as he realised, was useless. He turned back towards The Yewtrees.

His head was cut slightly. He bathed it when he reached his bedroom. Then he undressed again and lay down. But now sleep refused to come to him. In its stead an intense activity of the mind compelled his thoughts towards the solution of the mystery which had been so violently thrust on them.

One thing was certain. This gipsy girl had been desperately afraid lest he should see her face. She had been ready, too, to go to any length rather than be captured. Her courage and her agility were above the qualities usually displayed by the class to which, apparently, she belonged. That idea dwelt in his mind, yet it offered no clue on which he might hope to work.

He got up as soon as the day dawned and went out again to re-investigate the scene of his discomfiture. He examined the ground carefully in the vain hope that some accident might have favoured him with a fresh piece of evidence. But there was nothing to be seen. He climbed the hedge and struck across the fields, taking the line which, as he guessed, the girl had taken when returning. from her search in the paddock. He reached the clump

of trees from which the hoot of the owl had come without having obtained the least enlightenment. He bent down to examine the ground.

A moment later he stood up again sharply and listened. A faint tinkling of bells was borne to him across the stillness of the morning.

He glanced about him with perplexed eyes. The sound seemed strangely incongruous, nor could he determine from what quarter it proceeded. It came, moreover, intermittently, as though some invisible hand shook the bells and then, again, desisted.

He waited a moment or two and then walked a few yards in the direction of the house. The sun had risen and its earliest rays quivered in the air. The whole sky was filled with new light. He stood, rejoicing in the wonderful spectacle.

The tinkling of the bells came once more to his ears.

He turned sharply, and as he did so uttered a cry of amazement. A few yards away, on a branch of one of the trees, was seated a very small monkey, clad in a coat of green velvet on which a great number of tiny metal bells had been embroidered. The bells gleamed in the sunlight.

He approached the little creature, which seemed inclined to be friendly. But just as he came below the bough on which it sat, it grimaced angrily and sprang away and with almost incredible agility hoisted itself from branch to branch, until he lost sight of it among the leaves. Then it reappeared again, swinging giddily far above him, its bells filling the morning with their diminutive notes.

He drew a sharp breath, and the dullness of his eyes was transformed momentarily to excitement. So this—*this*—was the explanation for which they had been seeking! This wretched creature, escaped no doubt from some gipsy van, had actually placed in jeopardy The Wizard's chance of winning his greatest race!

He stood with the wonder of the thing stamped on his kindly features. The monkey must have entered the horse-

box while the colt was out to exercise. Doubtless it fell asleep there, among the warm hay, and so passed unnoticed. He recalled the tiny marks on the horse's neck, the appearance and character of which had so greatly puzzled him; bites! The scrape, too, on the animal's flank, under its blanket, made, no doubt, when the monkey tried to jump from the ground to the plunging racehorse's back and missed its footing in the darkness. No wonder The Wizard, shut in with this little fury, had become terror-stricken. Again he started. And that, of course, furnished the complete explanation of the gipsy girl's midnight search. She was trying to find her lost pet. Possibly the owl calls he had heard had been her summons to it; gipsies were reputed to keep monkeys trained to steal eggs at night, and no doubt it was necessary to have some innocent-sounding way of recalling the marauders.

He thought with a sigh of regret of the terror his sudden appearance must have occasioned the poor girl. She must have supposed that her very life was threatened when she defended herself thus vigorously. He returned to the house and went at once to Lord Steadhouse's bedroom to offer his explanation of the mystery.

Next morning Doctor Hailey received an early summons to visit Mr. Jack Belamy in Belgrave Square. His sister, who spoke on the phone, declared that her brother had suffered from a severe fainting attack while getting ready to go to the Derby.

"We want you to tell him that he mustn't go," she added. "He flatly refuses to listen to anybody here."

As he drove down from Harley Street the doctor recalled the details of the case. Belamy was reputed to be a very rich man; he was tremendously eccentric and said to be a heavy plunger on the Turf. As so often happened in such cases, symptoms of mental strain had begun to show themselves, and during the last few weeks these had taken an exaggerated form. No doubt the excitement of Derby Day had proved more than his agitated nerves could stand.

The car stopped. He entered the big house and found

himself a moment later face to face with Zazel Belamy. Her beautiful, dark face was drawn with anxiety.

"My dear doctor," she cried, "it is so good of you to have come so quickly."

She advanced toward him and spoke in low tones, telling him how her brother had fainted on getting out of bed.

"We got a terrible fright at the moment. But happily he seems to have recovered now."

The door of the room opened as she spoke and the patient strode in. He protested in ringing tones against the absurdity of summoning a doctor. Nevertheless his lips were rather blue and he seemed a trifle unsteady on his feet. Doctor Hailey ordered him to go back to bed at once. Just then a child came to the door of the room and announced that the car was waiting.

"Please stay outside, Sybil," Zazel Belamy said in sharp tones.

The child frowned, and then, in a manner which proclaimed how spoiled it was, shook a punchinello toy it carried in its hand, so that the bells on the puppet's hat jingled harshly.

"I want to go now," it cried.

The girl turned to the doctor.

"My niece is crazy about going to the Derby," she explained, "and I should hate to disappoint her. We are rather late as it is——" She hesitated a moment. "So long as you can assure me there is no danger."

"Oh, no—no danger!"

Zazel Belamy hurried from the room. A moment later they heard a car start from the door. Doctor Hailey turned to his patient.

"It's the race, I suppose," he said dryly.

"My God, yes, doctor. I tell you I couldn't help it, I've taken tremendous risks." Belamy's big black eyes rolled as he spoke.

"The risk of your life included. As I told you when I last saw you, your blood pressure is dangerously high. If you do not give up your gambling habits nothing, I think, can save you."

The doctor's voice was stern. But he observed that his patient scarcely listened to him.

"It's that Wizard colt," he declared. "Never have believed in the horse."

Doctor Hailey cut short a confession which he could see was powerfully exciting his patient. He repeated his order that Belamy should go to bed and announced his intention of waiting in the house till he was obeyed. The man rang the bell for his servant and went upstairs. A few minutes later the doctor joined him.

He left the bedroom very shortly and descended to the hall. It was empty. He crossed to a table on which he had deposited his hat and gloves and was about to take these when suddenly his body seemed to stiffen. Lying folded on the table was a woman's shawl. With a quick, almost furtive movement, he put his hand in his pocket and extracted a small fragment of cloth. The fragment he had torn from the shawl of the gipsy girl on the road at Newmarket. He fitted the fragment to a tear in the garment before him.

It fitted exactly. A look of deepening concern appeared on his face. He caught his breath.

Then suddenly seizing his hat, he rushed from the house. Getting in his big Daimler car, he told the astonished driver to take him to Epsom, to the race course, adding:

"It is now nearly midday. There is not a moment to lose."

The drive seemed an interminable one. After Sutton was passed it became almost more than he could endure because of the traffic delays and stoppages. But at last, at 2.30, the car mounted the final ridge. The immense, wonderful Derby crowd, disposed in the great hollow of the Downs, was spread before him. He sprang out of the vehicle and strode down through the phalanx of motor omnibuses and charabancs to the course.

He reached it at a point on the straight very close to Tattanham Corner. The crowd was not dense here. He stood gazing over the heads of the people in front of him at the people opposite. Then he walked to the corner

and crossed the short course which tails off at this point. He mounted the hill, stopping every few minutes to repeat his scrutiny.

His face was flushed and his eyes bright. But the look of tense anxiety which had filled them since he left London remained. He kept glancing nervously at his watch and then at the distant height where, as he could see, the horses were gathering for the great race.

He managed to elbow his way to the railings at the top of the hill. At the same moment, like the earliest whisper of a storm, a muttered exclamation came from the vast crowd.

"They're off!"

He caught his breath. He leaned forward searching—searching with his horrified eyes, despair and wild hope mingled in his expression.

"My God!"

The sound of galloping hoofs came to his ears. He hesitated just an instant. Then, in spite of the yell of consternation which greeted his terrible foolhardiness sprang out on the race course and rushed across it.

As he came to the railings the galloping hoofs thundered near at hand. The tense silence of a mighty expectancy was in the air. He scrambled over and then, with a movement so swift that it was complete before the amazed spectators had time to prevent or protest against it, he snatched its toy from the hands of a child standing close to the railings and flung it far back across the heads of the crowd. The toy, as it was hurled away, emitted a faint tinkling of small bells.

At the same moment a gasp of horror held the mighty crowd in sudden and dreadful suspense.

The Wizard, who was galloping close to the rails, swerved away suddenly as though some nameless terror had struck at his heart. For a moment it seemed as though catastrophe, huge and overwhelming, was inevitable.

The next instant the colt had steadied himself. He swept out of sight into the straight and the roar of the multitude about the stands proclaimed already his march to victory.

Doctor Hailey had made his way back through the ranks of the crowd. As he reached the outside of it, the news that The Wizard had won was passed along. He searched the grass with his eyes a moment, and then finding what he sought, bent down and picked up the punchinello toy which he had flung away. He strode with it after the retreating figure of a young girl who was leading a child by the hand. He drew level with the girl and raised his hat.

"Your niece's toy, I think, Miss Belamy," he remarked.

Zazel Belamy's face was as pale as ashes. The words he had meant to speak, words which would have emphasized his execration of the diabolical cleverness she had shown, faded on his lips. He said merely:

"It would seem that even the lightest tinkle of a bell sets The Wizard shying. No doubt an association which recalls some former terrible experience to the horse's memory."

Again he raised his hat. He fell back among the crowd which flowed round about them.

Next morning the news of Jack Belamy's death was in all the papers. One of those vouchsafed to its readers the additional information that the dead man's losses, occasioned by the victory of The Wizard at Epsom, were believed to be not less than £50,000.